

SAINT PAULS.

SEPTEMBER, 1870.

THE THREE BROTHERS.

CHAPTER LIV.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

ON the next morning Ben went away without a word, no repentance of his intention or lingering desire to postpone it having apparently crossed his mind. He took leave of his mother the night before, for he was going away early. "It will not be for seven years this time," he said as he kissed her, and was going to kiss Mary, too,—a formula which his cousin, with a pang of mortification in her heart, felt might be better dispensed with. "Nay; I shall see you in the morning," she said, half terrified lest the blood which she felt to be scorching her cheek might "make him think anything." What should it make him think? She puzzled him a little, it must be allowed; but he was not the kind of man who can think of many different things at one time. His mind had been absorbed with the business which brought him to Renton. It was absorbed now with thoughts of what he had to do in the winding up of his own affairs. Now and then it flitted vaguely across his perception that Mary had something on her mind which, one time or other, it would be his business to see into. Dear little Mary! Ben was very fond of his cousin. If she had wanted a hair from the beard of the Cham of Tartary, or a golden apple from the Tree of Bliss in the gardens of the Enchanted Isles, he would have done all a man could do to get it for her. But he did not know now what she wanted, or if she wanted anything.

Laurie, too, was going away with Ben, though only to town; and the night before they left was a night of talk and recollections more than the separated family had yet permitted themselves. It was true that Hillyard put himself singularly in their way. Perhaps he had not had all the advantages of the Rentons; but still he was a gentleman,

though much knocking about the world had taken some of the outside polish off him, and he had never shown any inclination to intrude upon their private talk or make himself a sharer in the family communings,—never till now. Perhaps it was because they were just setting off again, and Ben's family came in for the attentissement, which might have been more justly bestowed upon his own. But it was ridiculous that he should plant himself by Mary, occupying her attention, and pouring forth his confidences upon her, as it seemed to him good to do. They were all gathered together in the drawing-room as they had been so many times before, after Mrs. Renton went to bed, with the windows open as usual, the lights shaded, the languor of the night and its wistfulness and soft content and melancholy stealing in. The half-darkness and the soft breathing of the night air, and the fluttering moths about the lamp, were all accessories of the picture which nobody could forget. And there was a mysterious gloom about the walls and the roof, owing to the shades on the lamps, which gave a more distinct character to the half-visible faces, each in its corner, and to the brilliant circles of illumination round every light. They had begun to talk of their father, and this last event in the story of his will, which was so strange, and so unlike all his previous life.

"One would like to know what he meant by it," said Laurie. "Poor, dear old father! If there had been something dependent on the issue of our probation; if there had been a reward for the man that had used his talent best, like you, Ben; or for the man who had given him an heir, like Frank;—But all to end in this aimless way! We have always thought ourselves very sound in the brain, we Rentons, or I know what one might be tempted to think."

"That is what I have thought all along," said Frank.

"It is not for us to say so, at least," said the elder brother. "I believe illness coming on had confused his mind. They say it does. I don't think he can have been quite clear what he was doing. And then he remembered at last, and was sorry,—don't you recollect?"

"My poor father!" said Laurie. And then there was a pause; and in this pause, through the dimness and the stillness, came the sound of Hillyard's voice, too low to be distinguishable, coming from Mary's corner, addressed to her with a volubility and eagerness which struck them all with amazement. He had not meant to be so audible; and when, after the first silence, a little laugh burst from Alice at the one voice thus brought into prominence, he faltered and stopped too, as people do under such circumstances. What could he be finding to say to Mary? and what could Mary be thinking of to listen to him? were the half-angry thoughts that flashed over Ben's mind. Of course he was a guest here, and every-

body's equal. Yet still, it seemed to Ben as if, on the whole, this was bad taste, to say the least, on Hillyard's part.

But Alice, though she had laughed at the sound of the solitary voice which continued when they had all dropped their own, was eager to let loose her opinions, too, on the other subject. "I cannot see what other will could have been just, now," she said. "If he had told you something to do, it would have been different. But he gave you nothing to do; and how were you to know what he wanted? It was not Laurie's three princes, after all."

"And, now I come to think of it, I don't believe in my three princes," said Laurie. "I have not a doubt they fought it out when papa was out of the way. Fancy two elder brothers giving in to a fellow because he had the marvellousest little dog that ever was seen! It came to natural justice, you may be sure, at the end, and the strongest had it. And it has come to a kind of natural justice with us, so far as law allows. Poor old father! One used to feel as if he must be so much wiser than we were. And it proves he was as confused as the rest, and saw just as short a way before him, and stultified himself, half-knowingly, like one of his own sons."

"Don't!" said Ben, with a voice of pain. He was more angry with his father than soft-hearted Laurie ever could have been, and consequently was less able to talk of it. "Thank Heaven!" he cried, suddenly, "I don't suppose it has done any of us any lasting harm."

"No," said Laurie out of the silence, after a pause, "no more harm than we should have done ourselves, anyhow."

And somehow, in the room, there was the sound of a sigh; whom it proceeded from it would be hard to tell—six people all gathered together of a soft autumn evening, and not too much light to betray them, it would be strange if there was not more than one who sighed. But Alice, in the shade, slid her hand through her husband's arm, and said joyously, "It has done us no harm, Frank!" "Because we would not let it," he whispered back again, brushing her soft cheek with his moustache. Yes, that was the secret. Have your will, anyhow, whether fortune permit or no; and in the long run the chances are you will come out just as well as your neighbour, who allowed fortune to constrain him, and will have had your will and your happiness into the bargain;—bad social morality, perhaps, but just as good fact as any other. The young soldier and his wife had their little triumph unsuspected by the others, who heard but a momentary whisper in that corner, which was drowned by Hillyard's more forcible whisper, always conversing with Mary. What did the fellow mean by it? Ben was so disgusted by this "bad taste" of his friend, that he got up and stepped out on the lawn, with some murmur about a cigar. And the other men all rose and joined him,

though not with any enthusiasm. When they had all trooped out, he stepped back for a moment, and held out his hand to his cousin.

"Is it really the case, Mary, that I am not to bid you good-bye to-night?"

"No," Mary said, drawing back, with a shy hesitation which he did not understand; "do you think I would let you go away,—so far,—and not make your breakfast for you the last morning? This is only good-night."

"Good-night, then," he said, but held her hand still. "What was that fellow, Hillyard, so voluble about?"

"That fellow!" said Mary. "I thought he was your great friend. Indeed, it was mostly you he was talking about."

"A poor subject," Ben said, only half satisfied; and then she drew her hand away from him, and he went off with a half-suspicious glance at her, and a certain sense of uneasiness, to join the men outside.

A parting in the morning is of all things in the world the most detestable. He who would have a tender farewell, and leave a soft recollection behind him, let him depart by the night train,—the later the better,—when there is no inquisitive light to spy out, not only the tear, but even that humidity of eye which tells when tears are coming. Mary's eyes were in this condition when Ben rose from his hurried breakfast, and came up to her in the full eye of day and of Mr. Hillyard, who lingered, though nobody wanted him. She had kept behind the urn, feeling that, after all, had she stayed up-stairs and watched him going away from her window, it would have been less unsatisfactory. "You'll write and let me know how things are going on," Ben had said, not feeling particularly cheerful himself, but yet lifting the best part of the wing of a partridge to his mouth. "Oh yes, of course I will write, as usual," Mary said, and he gave a nod of satisfaction as he eat. To be sure, he had to eat before he started. And then she added, "You'll let us know as soon as you arrive." And he nodded again over his coffee cup. It was to give him his breakfast she had got up,—and what else was there to be expected? And when the dog-cart was at the door, Ben wiped the crumbs carefully from his moustache, and went up to his cousin and took her hand and bent over her. "Good-bye, Mary," he said, kissing her cheek, "take care of yourself. I'll write a line from town before we start. I'm very sorry, now it has come to the last. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Ben!" she said, unable to articulate another word. The blood seemed all to stagnate about her heart. Up to this moment there had always been a possibility of something happening,—something being done or said. But now it was all over. A certain haze came over her eyes, and yet she could see him looking back at her as he went to the door with an indefinable expression. She stood and held by the back of the chair, looking out of the

window before which the dog-cart was standing, forgetting for the moment that there was any one else in the world.

"Good-bye, Miss Westbury," said a voice at her ear.

Mary turned round with an impatience it was scarcely possible to disguise. "Oh, Mr. Hillyard, I beg your pardon! I thought you were gone. Good-bye!" she said. He was standing holding out his hand with his eyes bent on her, and a glow in them such as even a woman agitated with feelings of her own could scarcely mistake.

"Good-bye, Miss Westbury. I shall never forget the days I have spent here," he said, and stooped over her hand, as if—

"Hillyard! do you mean to stay all day?" cried Ben from the dog-cart, in a tone which was not sweet.

"Indeed you will be late for the train; you have not a moment to lose," cried Mary, withdrawing her hand.

He muttered something, she could not tell what,—nor, indeed, did she care. "Not farewell yet," was it he said? But what did it matter? The interruption had so far roused her that she felt able to go to the window and smile and wave her hand to Ben. Hillyard was still holding his hat in his hand, trying to attract her attention, when the dog-cart disappeared down the avenue. Then Mary sat down and gazed straight before her, with that poignant sense of unreality which such a moment gives. Five minutes ago he was there; and now here was vacancy, silence,—a blank in which life lost itself. Five minutes, and all the world changed! Her brow was burning and heavy with tears unshed. An ache which seemed physical, so hard the strain and pain it produced in her, went through her heart. And a whole long day to go through, and the birds singing merrily, and the sun shining, and old Willis on his way to remove the remains of Ben's breakfast, and to spread the table for the family that remained! "It don't seem no good, do it, Miss Mary, to have master home so short, and he been so long away?" Mary started to her feet at the words. No good indeed?—perhaps harm, if one dared say so!—deeper blank and silence after the momentary movement and the light!

And now to think it was all over, and that there remained nothing but the old life to be taken up again and gone on with just as before! If it had been night, when one could have shrouded one's self in one's own room, and cried or slept, and forgotten one's self! But it was day,—early morning,—with a whole heap of duties to be performed, and people to look on while she was performing them. And Mary felt sick of it all,—the duties, and the daylight, and the life. Laurie, who thought early rising idiotic, went by a much later train, at what he called a rational hour. And then the house was left in its old quiet, but for the presence of Frank and Alice and the children, which no doubt made a great difference. When Mary went to her godmother with the newspaper she was questioned minutely

about Ben's departure and his looks. "Did he eat any breakfast, Mary?" Mrs. Renton said, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

"He ate a very good breakfast," said Mary, with a slight sense of humour, but, on the whole, a greater sense of something like displeasure. Yes, he had been quite able to eat breakfast, though he was going away!

"And enjoyed it, poor fellow?" said his mother. "Ah, if one only knew when he would eat his next meal at Renton! And was he cheerful, my dear, or did he feel it very much? Poor Ben! None of you think how hard it is upon me!"

"You have Frank, godmamma," said Mary, "and if he settles at the Dovecote it will be very nice for us all. And there is Laurie close at hand whenever you want him, and no one could be more kind than Laurie."

"But neither Laurie nor Frank is Ben," said Mrs. Renton with decision, drying her eyes—which, alas! as her niece felt to the bottom of her heart, was most true. And then Mary read the papers, all the bits of news, as she had done any day these seven years. Had there been any break in the endless round, or had she only dreamed it? It seemed so hard to know; for the interruption, with all its agitations and pleasures, had vanished, and everything was as it had been before. Except indeed, that Frank and Alice made the dinner-table cheerful, and took the heavy duty of the drive off Mary's hands, which was a relief for which she should have been more grateful. But even that showed the difference between her own life and that of Frank's wife, though Mary, had she not been driven to it, was not given to such comparisons. For her there was but the usual monotonous promenade over the well-known, too well-known country; but Alice was taken to the Dovecote, and even the invalid grew interested about the changes necessary, and the furnishing and decorations of that abode. "The Frank Rentons" had all the pleasant excitement of settling down before them. And Mary felt that it was very wicked and unwomanly of her to desire any excitement, or to feel so wearily conscious of the want of interest in her own existence. Would it be much better in the Cottage with her mother, who in all these years had learnt to do without her, and whose whole mind was absorbed in her curate-boy? Perhaps that would not be any better. And, anyhow, it was evident that there was nothing to do in the meantime but to submit.

There was, however, an excitement awaiting Mary much nearer than she had any expectation of. It came to her just two days after Ben's departure, in the afternoon, when once more Alice and the children had gone to accompany Mrs. Renton in her drive, and she was alone in the drawing-room, with the window open as usual,—that window by which everybody went and came,—everybody, that is to say, belonging to the family. Mary was reading, seated in her

favourite chair, half buried in the curtains, when it seemed to her that a shadow fell on her book,—a very familiar accident. It must be Frank, she thought, looking up; but to her great amazement she saw it was Hillyard standing with a deprecating anxious look before the window. She made a spring from her seat with that one thought which fills the mind of a preoccupied woman to the exclusion of all personal courtesy and consideration. Something must have happened to Ben! "What is it? for God's sake, tell me! tell me!" she said, rushing out upon him, dropping her book, and holding up her clasped hands.

"Nothing, Miss Westbury," he said, putting out his hand to take hers, with the humblest, softest tone,—a tone amazing in its gentleness from such a big-bearded unpolished man. "I was only waiting to ask you whether I might come in."

"But you are sure there is nothing wrong with—my cousin?" Mary cried; and then recollected herself, and was covered with confusion. "I beg your pardon; but seeing you so suddenly it was natural to think of Ben. I felt as if you must have brought bad news, Mr. Hillyard; don't think me very silly—but godmamma may come in any moment from her drive. You are sure there is nothing the matter with Ben?"

"Nothing at all. I left him a few hours ago, very well and very busy," said Hillyard; and then once more he added in the same soft, subdued, disquieting tones, "Will you let me come in?"

"Yes, surely," said Mary, though she was trembling with the sudden fright. "But it is so strange to see you. Is there any change in your plans? I thought you were to go to-day." And then a wavering of light and colour came over her face suddenly in spite of herself. This man, who had no possible business at Renton, surely could not have come alone!

"I begged for another day," said Hillyard, following her into the room. "I daresay I was a fool for my pains. It may be years before I return again. I asked for another day."

"I am sure godmamma will be very glad," said Mary, courteously; "but somehow it was very startling to see you, and not Ben."

And she gave a momentary glance out, as if still she expected the other to appear. Such a reception to a man who had come on Hillyard's errand was like frost to a brook. It bound him,—shrank him up within himself. He stood looking at her with a half-stupefied, wistful gaze, saying nothing. Ben; always Ben! Was that the only thought in her mind? Was it possible she could see him thus, and meet his eye, and not see his errand was altogether apart from Ben?

Mary, however, was so much occupied with her tremor and start, and curious little flutter of expectation, that it did not occur to her as strange for some minutes that her present companion said no more.

She took his silence with the composure of perfect indifference. She was not even curious about him, further than concerned her cousin. Why should she be curious about Mr. Hillyard? But at last it did strike her that politeness required that she should speak to him. And, looking up, she caught the expression of his face and of his attitude all in a moment, and the ardent light in his eyes. Such a look is not to be mistaken. With a sudden rallying of all her blood to her heart, and steadying of her nerves for an utterly unforeseen but unmistakable emergency, Mary faltered and stopped in her intended speech, waiting for what was to come.

"Miss Westbury," he said, "I might as well tell you at once that I see what a fool I am. I have my answer before I have spoken. You think no more of me than if I were Ben Renton's horse, or his dog, or anything that belonged to him. I see it quite plain, and I might have seen it before I went away on Wednesday; but there are things in which a man can not be anything but a fool."

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Hillyard?" said Mary. "I hope I have not been rude. You are a stranger to us all. It is only through Ben we have known you; and it was natural when I saw you that I should think of my cousin. If I have hurt your feelings I am sure I beg your pardon." In all this she was talking against time, hoping that Frank or somebody would come in.

"No," he said; "I know I had no right to think of anything else. Of course I am a stranger. Ben's dog,—that is about it! I am not sneering, Miss Westbury. I should not have minded your calling me so when I came."

And there he stood, turning his eyes away from her, a big strong man of the woods as he looked, abashed and disconcerted, like a chidden child. He gazed out blankly, pulling his beard, with a flush of such quick mortification and downfall as a boy might feel when he sees his hasty projects fall to nought, and yet a deeper pang underneath than any boy could bear. Altogether the man looked so humbled and sore and sad, silenced in the very moment of effusion, that Mary's heart was moved. She was sorry for him, and remorseful for her own indifference. It seemed almost needful to let him say out his say by way of consolation.

"We all called you Ben's friend," she said; "his best friend, whom we have heard of for years. Nobody else could have come among us at such a time. You must not think I mean anything disrespectful or unkind."

Then there came a great burst of words from him. "That was what I thought," he said; "that you had been used to hearing of me; that I might have been to you as an old friend. I too have heard of you for years. And look here, Miss Westbury; you may scorn me, but I must say it, I have been in love with you for years. I used to see your letters, and think there was a woman, if one could ever hope to

get within speech of her! And then I came here. I ought never to have come. My heart was full of you before, and you may think what it was when I saw you. Don't stop me, please; it is better now that it should all come out. You were kind to me, as you would have been to any stranger; but you did not know what was in my mind, and I did, and went on fire like a fool. There now, I see how it is. I won't grieve you by asking anything. Only give me your hand and say you forgive a rough fellow for taking it upon him to love you, before he ever saw you; and behaving himself like an ass when he did."

"Mr. Hillyard, I am so sorry," said Mary, with tears in her eyes. "I did not mean,—I never thought,—It is me whom you must forgive,—if you can."

"You!" said the strange man. "God bless you! that's what I say. You and forgiving have nothing to do with each other." And then he took her hand between both his, and gazed down upon her with a fond, lingering, sorrowful look, as if he were getting her face by heart. "I don't know why I came," he said, muttering to himself; "I knew it would be exactly so,—just so. And yet I wanted you to know——." And then the man seemed suddenly to forget her presence altogether. Standing there, holding her hand, he might have fallen into a dream so perfectly still was he. But her hand was lost, buried between both his, held fast, while she stood perforce by him. And yet there was no force in it, no rudeness, but only a profound melancholy silence,—a sacrifice of the hidden sweetness he had been cherishing in his life.

"Mr. Hillyard," she said softly, "you must say good-bye to me and let me go." And then he woke up and came to life.

"The other hand too," he said, "for this once. Good-bye, and God bless you! It's all I'll ever have for my love. God bless you! Good-bye!"

He did not even kiss her hands, but held them fast; and then let them drop, and turned, stooping his tall head through the white curtains, and went out as he came in. Mary stood looking after him with an indescribable sensation. Was he really gone, this man who had been nothing to her barely an hour since, and now was part of her life? or was it a dream altogether, an invention of her fancy? His heavy foot ground upon the gravel for two or three steps while she stood in her amazement looking after him; and then he stopped, and turned round, and came back. But he did not attempt to come in. She on the one side of the white curtains, and he on the other, stood for another moment and looked at each other, and then he cleared his throat, which was husky. "I am not coming back," he said, "I have just one word to say. If there should ever be a time when you might think,—not of me, I don't mean of me, for I'm a stranger as you say,—but that a man's love and support might be of use to you,

—they say women feel that sometimes, if things don't go altogether as they wish,—then let me but know, hold up only your little finger, Mary,—there! I've said it for once,—and I'll come if it were from the ends of the earth!"

And then, without another word or look, he went away.

Was this the excitement she had been wishing for, and blaming herself for wishing? Mary ran up to her room in terror of meeting any one, with her heart beating wildly in her breast. Here was an incident, indeed, to diversify a dull afternoon, a dull life! She was so touched and excited, and moved by compassion and surprise and regret, that the effect upon her was not much less than if Hillyard's extraordinary suit had been that of a man to whom her heart could have responded. She sat down and hid her face in her hands, and got rid of some of her excitement in tears, and went over the strange scene. How strange a scene! For all these seven years,—her best and brightest,—Mary had never heard the voice of love. Now and then a tone of that admiration and interest which might have come to love had just caught her ear from the outside world, but she had been drawn back into her retirement and the deeper tone had never followed. And now, all at once, here was passion of such a kind as seldom startles a woman's ears in these days. An utter stranger an hour ago, and now,—happen what might, should she never see the man again,—a bit of her life! Mary's head swam, and the world went round with her. "They say women feel that sometimes, if things don't go altogether as they wish." What did he mean? Had he read in her heart more than others could? Was she one to fall into a longing for some love and support, some awakening and current of activity in her life, after all youthful dreams were gone? The suggestion moved Mary with a humbling sense of her own weariness and languor, and senseless disappointment, and longing for she knew not what. She was not one of those women to whom somebody's love is indispensable,—if not one, then another. With a cheek burning with shame, and eyes hot with tears, she rose up and went down again to her duties, such as they were. Henceforward she was determined she should suffice to herself. This, after the first shock of emotion, was all the effect poor Hillyard's sacrifice upon her altar had on Mary. That he should have seen that all was not going altogether as she wished! After all, what better had most women to do with their lives, than to tend a real or imaginary invalid, to order dinners, to read newspapers, to go out every afternoon for a drive? And she had perfect health, and a beautiful country, and plenty of books, and all the poor people in Renton parish to occupy her. To think with all that, there might come a time when she would want a man's,—any man's,—love and comfort! The counter-proposition, that a man should some time in his life long to have a woman by him, does in no way shock the delicacy of the stronger

creature. But what woman is there who would not rather die than acknowledge personally for herself that a man is necessary to the comfort of her existence? In the abstract, it is a different matter. Poor Hillyard! the immediate result of his pilgrimage of love, and hopeless declaration was to move Mary Westbury, in a wild flame of indignation at her own unwomanliness, to the task of contenting herself, energetically and of set purpose, with all the monotonies of her life.

CHAPTER LV.

WHAT IT ALL MEANT TO LAURIE.

WHEN Laurie Renton arrived in town, he went with the story of his family's fortune and his own, as was natural, to the padrona, who had now a double interest in the tale. She had already heard of it in a letter from Alice; but such a narrative is naturally more full and satisfactory by word of mouth.

It was in the same house, up the same stairs, in the same studio, that Laurie sought his friend. Everything was seven years older, and the hair growing thin on the top of Laurie's head, and Alice the mother of children; but neither Mrs. Severn nor her studio was much changed. She had attained, when we saw her first, to that table-land which lies in the centre of an innocent and healthful life, and on which Time, if he does not stand still, moves with such equal and steady steps, that it is difficult to trace his progress; and as many more years were probably before her ere there would appear in the padrona any such marked signs of the passage of years as those which had already left their stamp on Laurie in his youth. There might be a few white threads among her hair, at least she said there were; but, for all that any one could have told, she might have been wrapt in some enchanted sleep for all those years, instead of working, and thinking, and sorrowing, and taking such simple pleasures as came to her. The pleasures had been less and the sorrows greater since Alice left her; but now Edie had grown, as everybody said, a great girl, and the mother's heart was stirring into life in her development, to prepare for herself another crisis and sacrifice. It was years now since Laurie had returned from his first self-banishment to Italy. He had come back and he had been away again from time to time, but he had always returned here,—“home” as he liked to call it,—and for a long period there had been nothing in the character of his feelings which made it painful to him to come. How this was he could not tell. When he went away on that forlorn journey to Rome he had felt as if he never could look again upon the woman whom he loved with all his heart, but who, as nature herself indicated, could never be more to him than a friend. She could not be his,—never,—though everything in heaven and

earth were to plead for him,—and the only thing for him to do was to rush away from her and bury himself and his unhappy love out of sight for ever. These had been his feelings when he went away ;—but, somehow, they did not last. Slowly, by degrees, he and his heart came back to her without any anguish or despair in them. When he returned, and went half tremblingly to see if he could bear the sight of her, Laurie found, somewhat to his astonishment, that the sight, instead of driving him wild with disappointed affection, soothed and consoled and softened him as nothing else could do. Perhaps, had it been possible that she should become any other man's wife, the sensation would have been different ; but there had long ago ceased to be any strong wish on the matter in Laurie's mind. The old custom of hanging about her house came back upon him. He would come and talk to her of all his own concerns, and of a great many of hers, by the hour together ; and not of realities only, but of fancies,—everything that came into his head. There was the strangest transposition of ordinary rules in their intercourse. While he lounged about, and talked and poured out all his mind, she would be working on steadily, pausing to note her effects,—now and then calling him into counsel on some knotty point, responding to his thoughts, understanding him even when he but half uttered his meaning, giving him a certain proof of perfect sympathy and friendship more soft and tender than ordinary friendship,—and yet never stopping in her work. Had they been of the same age, such a thing of course could not have been possible ; but on the vantage-ground of a dozen additional years the woman stood calm and steadfast, and the man too, his boyish fit of passion over, was calm. No doubt there was a whisper at one time in the artists' quarter that Mrs. Severn was going to make a fool of herself and marry a man young enough to be her son. But as time disproved that matter, the world, which after all is not such a stupid world, but acknowledges, after due probation, the privileges that can be safely accorded to the blameless, held its tongue,—or only jeered innocently by times at the friendship. “ Such things are impracticable generally, and dangerous, you know, and all that. It is all very well to talk of friendship ; but one knows it always falls into love on one side or the other. I really do believe an exception ought to be made for the padrona and Laurie Renton,” was what was said in Fitzroy Square. And as the two took matters with perfect composure, and never looked as if they supposed either the world or the Square to have anything to do with it, the unusual bond between them soon came to be considered a matter of course. It was not such a bond that the man was always at the woman's apron-strings. He went away, sometimes for months together, and travelled about in that half-professional half-dilettante way that suited Laurie ; and then he wrote to her, and next after Alice's, Laurie's letters were looked for in Mrs. Severn's house. And I will

not say that there was not now and then just a word in them which the padrona passed over when she read these epistles to the boys, and which made her half smile half sigh with a curious mingled sense of regret and amusement and pleasure. He would say, when he was describing something to her, "If you were but here, padrona mia, I should want no more." Foolish fellow! as if she ever could be with him, as if it would not be the height of folly and weakness, and upsetting of the whole rational world and all the modesties of nature. But yet, so long as it evaporated in a harmless sigh like this, it hurt no one,—not Laurie, who perhaps loved his wanderings all the better for that soft want in them; and not her, as she doubled down the page at that point with a half laugh. And when he came home, the first place he went to was the Square. To be sure, such a friendship put all thoughts of marrying out of Laurie's head, as Mrs. Suffolk, who thought everybody should marry, sometimes deplored. "Unless you send him away, padrona, he will always be just as he is. He will never think of any other kind of life," she would say to her friend. "My dear, he has no money to marry on," the padrona would say,—and so Laurie's heart had always found a home and every kind of support and consolation and sympathy in Fitzroy Square.

And, to tell the truth, the money had been rather a difficult point with him now and then. To live upon two hundred a year when you have been brought up a Renton of Renton, is a matter which requires a great deal of consideration. But Laurie, fortunately for himself, had no expensive tastes, and he painted some pictures, and, which was more remarkable, sold some; and even found himself on the line at the Academy, thus carrying out his highest dreams. But it did not give him the gratification nor cause the stir he had once anticipated. It was a small picture, a little bit of Italian air and sunshine, and Slasher gave it a little paragraph all to itself in the "Sword;" but the people whom he had once pictured to himself finding out his name in the catalogue, and calling heaven and earth to witness that Laurie Renton had done something at last, had by this time forgotten all about Laurie Renton, or he had forgotten them, which came to the same thing. And candidly, in his soul, Laurie allowed, that had not old Welby been on the hanging committee, probably it never would have reached "the line;" and had not Slasher been a friend of his, would never have been noticed in the "Sword." But it sold for a hundred pounds, which was always an advantage. The picture was called "Feliciello, on Tiberio," and was the picture of a dark-faced Capriote guide, on one of the highest points of his island, pointing out to a fair English girl the points in the wonderful landscape round. It was Edie Severn, who had never been there, with her golden hair streaming round her, who was the English girl. But handsome Feliciello had been studied on the spot. And Mr. Rich of Richmond,—always a great patron of the fine arts,

—gave Laurie a hundred pounds for it, and thought it one of his greatest bargains. "This picture has a story," he would say to his guests; "it was painted by a gentleman, the son of one of my neighbours in the country, a man who had never been brought up to make his living by art. It is quite a romance; but I hear matters are settled, and that he has come into his share of the money, and will paint no more, and I think I was very lucky to secure this. My daughter, Lady Horsman, will tell you all about it." "About the picture painted by a gentleman?" Nelly would say on being questioned. "Most painters that I know are gentlemen. Papa means to infer that he is not much of a painter, I suppose." For Lady Horsman was not fond of the Rentons, and had never cared to cultivate their society. "If you get my lady on painters she'll talk till midnight," Sir George said out of his moustache. He did not know the difference between a signpost and a Titian, and thought the one quite as pretty as the other; but he was the head of one of the oldest families in England, and Master of the Hounds in his county, and a great many other grandeurs; and, so far as I know, Nelly had the full value for her fifty thousand pounds.

This, however, is a digression a long way out of Fitzroy Square. Laurie went to the padrona with his story, and found her still in a state of excitement over Alice's letter,—the second since the event,—with something in it about the Dovecote, which was the last new possibility. She had just been taken to see it, and her letter was full of an enthusiastic description of its beauties. "Think, mamma, of a lovely little house close to Renton, with a lawn sloping to the river, and a cow, and a pony-carriage, and I don't know what," the young wife wrote in her delight. "And Frank thinks he may afford himself a hunter, and there is the sweetest honeysuckle room for Edie and you!" The padrona, being mother to the being upon whom this glorious prospect was opening, was more interested at first in the Dovecote than in anything Laurie had to say.

"To think one has only to take the train and be with her in an hour,—after being so far away for,—a lifetime!" the padrona said, with tears in her eyes.

"Only six years," said Laurie; "but never mind; after Alice has had her turn perhaps you will think of me."

"When you know I always think of you!" said Mrs. Severn. "It becomes you to be exigent, Laurie! and you are not going to have a cow, and a pony-carriage, and everything that is most delightful on the face of the earth. Think of Alice having a cow! You are so terribly blasé, it does not seem to strike you. And Edie is out, the child, so that there is no one to be glad but me."

"It does not strike me at all," said Laurie. "If she had a dozen cows, I think I could bear it. But some day I must take you to see the Dovecote, padrona, since you like it so much."

"I wish they had had Feliciello," said Mrs. Severn. "If one had known you were all to be so well off,—it would have pleased Frank."

"Frank will like some of those vile chromos just as well," said Laurie. "I'll buy him a few I think. And I mean to bring Ben to see you to-night; then you will know us all. Not that there will be any intense gratification in that; but you'll like Ben. He is made of different stuff from the rest of us. There is more in him. He is not so cheeky as Frank; and he is another sort of fellow, to be sure, from a good-for-nothing like me."

"Laurie, there is something the matter," said the padrona, turning upon him with her palette in her hand. She knew all his tones like the notes in music, and heard the far-off quiver of one of his fits of despondency already vibrating in the quiet. "Is not this as good for you as for the rest?"

"Oh yes, quite as good," he said abruptly, with his eyes on her work. "You are putting too much yellow in that light."

"Am I? but that is not the question. Laurie, never mind the light, but tell me what is wrong."

"I must mind the light," he said. "If I can't put you right when you get into a mess, what is the good of me. It's all wrong and it's all right, padrona mia, and I don't know that it matters much one way or another; but I don't quite like your shadows. With that tone of light they should have more blue in them," he went on, gazing at the picture and shading his eyes with his hand.

"But it will make a great difference in your life," said Mrs. Severn, putting down her tools and drawing a chair near to where he sat.

"That is just it," he said. "It will make no difference to speak of. It is a great thing for Ben; and for Frank, too, it will be everything. You can see that clearly. But what difference will it make to me? More money to spend perhaps, and better rooms to live in; but no sort of expansion or widening out of life. That's not possible, you know. It was put a stop to once, and no change that I know of can effect it now."

"You cannot mean to reproach me, Laurie?" said the padrona.

"No," he said, still fixedly gazing at the picture; "I don't reproach you. Being you, perhaps you could have done nothing else. I am not complaining of anybody; but this is how it is,—you see it for yourself."

"Laurie, listen to me," she said, with eagerness, laying her hand on his arm. "I have wanted to speak to you for long, and never liked to begin the subject. You must make an effort to break this spell. I did not say a word as long as you were poor,—for what could you do?—and I thought I was always some consolation to you; but now that you have money enough, and can make a new beginning,

—Laurie, do you know, I think it would be better for you to go away from me."

"What, go away again?" he said, with a half smile, "as I did when I went to Rome? No, there is no such occasion now."

"Of course there is no such occasion now. That dream has passed away, as all dreams do. But, Laurie, for that very reason I speak. Even what you were so foolish as to wish then you don't wish now."

She made a momentary pause, but he gave no answer. It was quite true. He was not in love with her any longer,—though she was the creature dearest to him in the world. Nor did he any longer want to appropriate or bind her closer to himself. He would not have admitted this change in words, but it was true.

"I don't think in the least that you have ceased to care for me," she continued; "but it is different,—it is not in that way. And you are getting not to care much what happens. We talk over it, and come to our conclusions; and after that, good and evil are much the same to you. That is why I think you should go away,—not to Italy, as you did before, but out of this neighbourhood, to some place like the one you used to live in, and go back into the world."

"Why, I wonder?" said Laurie. "The world and I had never much to say to each other. And at least I have some comfort in my life here."

"Too much, a great deal," said the padrona, with a smile. "You know you can always come to me, whether it is a pin that pricks, or a storm that overtakes you. I am fond of you; and you can always reckon on my sympathy."

"Always!" said Laurie, stooping to kiss the hand she had laid on his arm.

"Yes; but that is not good for you," said Mrs. Severn, hastily withdrawing her hand. "Now is the moment to preach you Helen Suffolk's little sermon. She says you will never marry so long as you are constantly here."

"Marry!" said Laurie, looking at her, and then turning his head away with a half contemptuous impatience.

"Well, marry. Why should not I say so? If I have stood in your way, unwillingly, unfortunately, once, why should that shut up all your life? Laurie, if I were to ask you to reconsider all this, and make a difference,—for my sake?"

"I could not marry even for your sake," he said, turning to her with a sudden laugh; "though there is no other inducement I would do so much for. Tell me something else to do to show my devotion, and let everything go on as it was before."

"Not as it was before," said Mrs. Severn. "This atmosphere might be good enough for you when you were poor. At least, it did you no harm; but now I want you to go back into the world."

"You want me to be wretched, I think," said Laurie. "I have got used to this atmosphere, as you call it; and it suits me. But I have forgotten all about the world. What have I done that I should be sent back among people who have forgotten me, to mix myself up with things in which I take no interest? Padrona, in this you do not show your usual wisdom. Let us return to the question of the light."

"Not yet," she said. "It is because I am anxious about you that I speak. This is such a point in your life; a new beginning,—anything you please to make it,—and you feel yourself how hard it is to think that it will make no difference. Laurie, what I want you to do is to break this thread of association, and turn your back upon the past."

He turned and looked at her as she spoke, and their eyes met;—hers earnest and steady; his with a smile, which was full of tenderness, and a kind of playful melancholy dawning in them. "But that is not what I want to do," he said, the smile growing as he met her gaze. She turned away with a little impatient exclamation. It was not the kind of reply she had looked for.

"You are provoking, Laurie," she said. "You have regained the ground you stood on seven years ago, and why should you refuse to recall the circumstances too?"

"And make the seven years as if they had never been?"

"I think you might, in a great measure," said the padrona, with a little flush on her cheek, "though you laugh. Nothing has happened in those seven years. Yes, I grant you, you have felt some things as you never did before, and learned a great many things. But nothing has happened, Laurie. Nothing has occurred either to tie up your freedom in any way, or to leave rankling recollections in your mind. There has been no fact which could fetter you. Indeed,—for all that has come and gone,—your life might be safer to begin anew than that of any man I know."

"Well, that is hard!" said Laurie, with more energy than he had yet shown; "the present is not much, the future I take no particular interest in, and you ask me to agree that there is nothing in the past! What has been the good of me altogether, then? Nobody will say that it has been worth a man's while to live in order to produce 'Feliciello.' Padrona, this is very poor consolation,—the poorest I ever knew you to give."

"I did not mean it so, Laurie."

"No, you did not mean it," he said; "you did not think that the past,—such as it is,—is all I have. Of course I might now go back to Kensington Gore, as you tell me, or somewhere else; and go to a few parties next season, perhaps. Fine fate! Didn't I tell you how I used to anticipate people finding my name in the Academy catalogue, and standing and staring at Laurie Renton's picture? And now I can't, for the life of me, remember who the people were I so

thought of! That's encouraging for a return to old ways. Let's say no more about it," said Laurie, getting up and following his friend to her easel. "After all, the boys and Edie shall have some pleasure out of the money, and then it will not be quite lost."

"The boys and Edie must not get into the way of looking to you for pleasure," said the padrona quickly;—"neither for you nor them would that be good."

"There it is now!" cried Laurie; "proof upon proof how little I am the better for what has happened. You cannot work for ever, padrona; but if I had all the gold mines that ever were dreamt of you would not take anything from me; and what is the good of my having it, I should like to know?"

"No, I would not take anything from you," she said, with a momentary smile; but it was a suggestion that made her tremble in her fortitude whenever it was made. "Laurie," she said, with a little gasp, turning to him for sympathy, "when I cannot work I hope I shall die."

"But one cannot die when one pleases, that is the worst of it," said Laurie. "I hope you will, padrona mia,—and I too—and then, perhaps, one might have a better chance for a new life."

This was not cheerful talk for a new beginning; but the amusing thing about Laurie, and, indeed, about the pair thus strangely united, was, that after all this had been uttered and done with they both became quite cheerful; and, a quarter of an hour afterwards, were planning an expedition to The Dovecote, taking Renton by the way, with all that enjoyment of the idea of a country excursion which is so strong in the laborious dweller in towns. The vision of gliding rivers and autumnal trees swept over Mrs. Severn's mind like a refreshing wind, carrying away all the vapours. For a time, she thought no more either of that twilight life which Laurie had chosen for himself, and of which she felt herself partly the cause, nor of her own anxieties, but went on painting, reducing the yellow tone in her light, and modifying her shadows, and full of cheerful discussion of the day and the way of going. To the moment its work or its thought; and to the next, why, another thought, another piece of work; and so forth, as pleases God. This blessing of temperament—special gift of heaven to its beloved,—belonged more or less to both. The artist-woman had it in its perfection, which was the reason why she had got through so much hard labour and so many struggles with eye undimmed and spirit unbroken; and Laurie had it in a degree which had done much to lead to the unsatisfactoriness and imperfection of his life,—which is a strange enough paradox, and yet true. For in the padrona this power of dismissing care and living in the hour was accompanied, as it often is, by the strongest vitality and energy of constitution, by a natural delight and pleasure in exertion, and by the perpetual, never absent spur of necessity. Whereas in Laurie's case

it was associated with the meditative, contemplative soul ; the mind that is more prone to thinking than to doing ; a slower amount of life in the veins, and an existence disengaged from necessities and responsibilities. Temperament had more to do with the matter than had that early blunder in his life for which the padrona never forgave herself. "If I had not stood in his way he would have made a life for himself, like other men," she would say to herself, with an ache in her heart, yet with that touch of tender gratitude to the man who had it in him to pour himself out like a libation on her path, which a woman cannot but feel, however undesired the sacrifice may be. I am afraid to acknowledge it, but the truth is that such a libation is very grateful to a woman. There is in it the most exquisite, tragical, heart-rending pleasure. Not that one would not regret it with all one's heart and soul, and do everything that one could, like Lancelot, to turn aside the rising passion. But even to Lancelot was not that self-offering of the lily-maid, though he would have given his life to prevent it, an exquisite sweetness and sorrowfulness, a combination of the deepest pain and gratification of which the soul is capable ? Such an act raises the doer of it,—be it man or woman,—out of the level of ordinary humanity, and envelops the receiver of the offering in the same maze of tenderest, most melancholy glory. Something of this feeling the padrona had for her Laurie, who had given her his life like a flower, without price or hope of price in this world. And yet, I think, temperament was at the bottom of it, and the sacrifice, and the sweetness of it, and all the subdued tones of his existence which had followed, were more to him than the brighter daylight colours of ordinary existence, even though he might feel the absence of those fuller tones now and then, once in a way.

But to some extent Laurie acted upon Mrs. Severn's advice. As luck would have it, his old rooms at Kensington Gore, having passed through many hands in the interval, proved to be vacant about this time. And Laurie secured them, and fitted up all his old fittings, his carved brackets and velvet hangings, and all the contrivances that had been so pleasant to him ; and had his bow-window once more full of flowers, and looked out once more upon the gay park and the stream of carriages as from an opera-box. But the ladies who looked up at his window once had passed away and given place to others, who knew not Laurie, or had forgotten him, and asked each other who was the man who stared so from that window ? And from Kensington Gore to Fitzroy Square is a very long walk to be taken every day. And though, to be sure, there are plenty of studios about Kensington, into which an amateur may drop, yet these are grand studios, flanked by drawing-rooms, with ladies to be called upon, and the flavour of society about them. It is true that Suffolk lives in that refined neighbourhood now, having made very rapid progress since the days when Mr. Rich bought "The Angles," and Laurie

put the studio in order for the reception of the patron, and got cobwebs on his coat. "They were very nice, those old days, after all!" Mrs. Suffolk says, when they talk it over; but they have now a spruce man-servant,—more spruce though not so well-instructed as old Forrester, Mr. Welby's man,—to move a picture that has to be moved, and open the door to the patrons and patronesses. And Laurie for one, to whom a man-servant is not the badge of grandeur and success which it is to Mr. Suffolk, rather preferred, I fear, the state of things in the old days, when they all clustered about Fitzroy Square.

But the padrona has not removed from No. 375, though she has been tempted and plagued to do so on all sides. Frank, who would prefer to have a mother-in-law,—since such a thing he must have,—in a habitable part of the town, is very energetic as to the advantage it will be to Edie when she grows up. And Alice recommends it with wistful eyes, as so much nicer for the air, not liking to say a word against the home of her youth. Mrs. Severn thinks it would be unkind to Mr. Welby to withdraw from him; and it would cost a great deal of money; and then there would be new carpets wanted for new rooms, and quantities of things; and, last of all, would not it be a still greater clog upon Laurie and hindrance to him in the possibility of his heart disengaging itself from all the pleasant bonds of the past? I think, however, that the thing which will finally resolve the point will be Frank's success in the competition for a Foreign Office clerkship, for which he is going in. None of his people have any doubt of his success; and, in that case, the boy may be trusted to make his mother's life a burden to her so long as she remains in Fitzroy Square. But what is to be done with Mr. Welby, and Forrester, to whom it would now be impossible to live out of sight of Edie and the boys, and withdraw themselves from the gradually increasing authority of the padrona, I don't know.

Laurie's sketch of the "Three Fairy Princes" turned up out of a packing-box when he took back his belongings to Kensington Gore; and he hung it in the place of honour over his mantelpiece. There anybody may see young Frank pushing forth towards the Indian towers and minarets, with a coronet hanging in a haze over the distant prospect; and Laurie himself, with his goods and chattels hung about him, and his lay-figure gazing blank over his shoulders, trudging towards the pepper-boxes of the National Gallery; and Ben scaling the rocks, like Mr. Longfellow's Alpine hero, with the nymph on the summit beckoning him,—not to eternal snows and supernatural excellence, but to Renton and the House of Commons. Frank has not got the coronet, nor Laurie, except in the very mildest accidental way, the glories of the Academy. But who is to tell what is waiting for Ben? At least, there is only another chapter to do it in, and the story is all but told.

CHAPTER LVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE day of Hillyard's visit was full of trial and excitement to Mary. To live in a household where everything is talked of freely, with the consciousness of having various matters of the deepest interest entirely to yourself, is not an agreeable position in any case; and to feel yourself thrilling through every vein with the concussion of a recent shock, while yet you are compelled to put on the most commonplace composure, is more trying still. Mary, however, had been used to it for some time back, if that was any alleviation. She only had known, or rather suspected, the ancient connection between Ben Renton and the beautiful Millicent. She alone had had the excitement of watching their meeting after so long an interval. She only had understood the passage of arms between the two; and she had witnessed their parting, which to her was of ten-fold more interest than even the great interest which the family had in common. And now, her spectatorship in Ben's romance being over, here had suddenly sprung up a romance of her own, so completely beyond all expectation that even now she could scarcely believe it had been real. Mary could not have betrayed Ben's secret to any one; but had her mother been at hand, or even had her godmother been less pre-occupied, I doubt whether she could have kept poor Hillyard's to herself. For it was her own, and in the excitement of the moment she might not have remembered that it was the man's also, and a humiliation to him. But, as it was, poor Mary had not the opportunity of relieving her mind. Mrs. Westbury was away, and Alice took her share in nursing Mrs. Renton, entering into it with a certain enjoyment of the task. There were even moments when Alice thought Mary unsympathetic, and was sorry for "poor grandmama," bringing with her a fresh interest in the ailments and the alleviations, such as was scarcely possible to the nurse who had been going through it all for seven years. Mary consequently at this extraordinary moment of her existence had lost all her habitual quiet, and all those possibilities of communication which had ever been open to her. She herself and her personal being were floated away, as it were, on the current of "the Frank Rentons." They had come into the house like an inundation, and left no room for anything but their own cheerful beginning of life,—their arrangements, their new house, their children, what they were going to do. The two women who had lived there so long in the silence were carried away by the vigorous young tide; and Mary, hiding her individual concerns in her own mind, lived for the rest of that evening a strange, abstracted, feverish sort of existence, like a creature in a dream, hearing the cheerful voices round her, and the lights shining, and figures flitting about, but only awaking to take any part in it when she was called upon energetically to

come out of her abstraction. The position altogether was so strange that she kept asking herself which scene was real and which was a dream;—either this was the reality,—this evening picture, with Frank talking to his mother on the sofa, and Alice working in the golden circle of the lamplight, and the urn bubbling, and gleams of reflection shining from the tea-table in the corner; or else the other scene, with Hillyard standing sunburnt and bearded and impassioned, telling her he had loved her before he even saw her,—saying, if some time, any time, she should want a man's love and support—and the rest of it. One thing was certain, they could not both be real; she had been dreaming them,—or else she was dreaming now.

Nor yet was Mary's excitement over for the night. When the evening post came in, a letter was brought to her, which at the first glance she saw was in Ben's handwriting. Well! there was nothing surprising in that. Of course Ben would write, though she had not expected it so soon. But the contents of the note were such as to raise to a climax her sense of being in some feverish dream. This is what Ben said:—

“DEAR MARY,—I want to speak half a dozen words to you before I go. I have heard something to-day which has taken me very much by surprise, and I cannot leave England without seeing you. But I don't want to disturb my mother with a hurried visit and another parting. If you will be at the beech tree on the river-walk to-morrow morning, at eight, I will come down by the first train and meet you there. Don't refuse me. It is of great importance. In haste,

“Yours, B. R.”

Mary's head went round and round as she sat,—hearing Frank's voice talking all the while, and Alice pouring out the tea,—and read this note. The question changed now, and seemed to be,—they or Ben; which was the phantom? But the paper and the writing were very real,—so real that she could see it had been written in excitement, and was blurred, and betokened a scratching and uncomfortable pen, which is a thing that no imagination would be likely to invent. When she had put the extraordinary note away in her pocket;—fortunately she had not said out loud “Here is a letter from Ben,” as on any other day she would have done;—Mary's mind went hopelessly into abstraction. She gave up the tea-making to Alice gratefully and without an effort, though in general she did not like to have her prerogatives invaded. She never uttered a word to help on the conversation. She had to be recalled as from a distance, when anybody spoke to her. Things had come to such a pitch that she seemed to lose her individual consciousness altogether. To have violent love made her one day by a man whom she scarcely knew, and to meet her cousin Ben clandestinely the next morning by the great beech, to talk over something of importance, which con-

cerned only her and him and nobody else in the family! The earth seemed to be going off its pivot altogether to Mary. She felt that now nothing would surprise her. If Mrs. Renton had suddenly proposed to her to walk to town, or Frank that she should swim across the river, it would have seemed to her perfectly natural. But to meet Ben by stealth at the great beech at eight o'clock! Could she have mistaken the words? For one moment a sort of gleam of eldritch fear came across her, and a reminiscence of the amazing manner in which the familiar forms of the nursery arranged themselves in the mind of little Alice in Wonderland in the story. Could it be that Ben was to start on his long journey to-morrow by the first train, and could the great beech be the name of the ship? Mary was so completely thrown off her balance, that this idea actually occurred to her. And then she felt that they must all have remarked that she had got a letter, and had thrust it stealthily into her pocket. Altogether, the evening swam over her somehow, she could not tell how. And then there was the stir of Davison's entrance, and Mrs. Renton's going to bed. And then Frank disappeared to smoke his cigar, and Alice, finding her companion uncommunicative, sat down at the piano, and began to play softly to herself, as she had been wont in the old days at home; and silence, broken only by sounds which helped to increase all the mists and made her feel a safety and comfort in the retirement of her thoughts, fell upon the quiet house.

Next morning Mary was awake and up before any one was stirring. She did not herself think that she had slept all the night; but she was still young enough to consider an hour or two's wakefulness a great matter. And she was as much afraid of Ben's visit being found out, as if he had been the most illegitimate of visitors. She was out soon after six, while the grass was still quite wet with dew, and went wandering up and down the river-walk like a ghost, under the cloistered shade of those great trees which, as yet, let no sunshine through. There was something in the air at that early hour which told that summer was waning, and Mary was chilly with nervousness which had all the effect of cold. She went all the way down to the river-side and basked in the sunshine which lay full on the open bit of green bank, by way of overcoming the shivering which had seized her. The world was so still, the birds so noisy,—which rather heightens than impairs the stillness,—the paths so utterly vacant and suggestive, that fancy continually caught glimpses of something disappearing behind the trees. Now it would seem a gliding dream-figure, now the last sweep of a robe just getting out of sight. The ghostliness of the early morning is different, but not less profound, than that of the night; and at six o'clock the Renton woods were as mysterious, as dim under the great shadows of the trees, as any enchanted wood. The sunshine went all round them, drying up the

dew on the open bank, and chasing the mists and chills of night ; but the river-walk was all brown and grey, and full of clear, mystical distances and windings, broken by upright shafts of trees. Any one might have appeared suddenly at such an hour in such a place ;—people out of books, people out of one's own straining fancy, people from the other world. And though it was Ben, and no other, for whom Mary Westbury was waiting, yet her imagination, over-excited, was ready to see anything. And she was alarmed by every waving leaf or bough that swayed in the morning air. If anybody should discover this tryst ! If it should be known that Ben had come in this sweet inconceivable sort of way to see her ! Had he been a tabooed lover, whose discovery would have involved all sorts of perils, Mary could not have been more afraid.

It was half-past seven before he came,—as indeed she might have known,—since that was the earliest moment at which any one could come by the first train. She could see him coming for a long way, making his way among the trees. He had not come in by any gate, but through some illegitimate by-way known to the Renton boys and the poachers, so lawless were all the accessories of this extraordinary stealthy meeting. He came along rapidly, making himself audible by, now and then, the sound of the gravel sent flying by his foot, or the crackle of a fallen branch on the path. And then he came in sight, walking very quickly, with a look of abstraction, wrapped in his own thoughts. He was close upon the bank before he caught sight of Mary, whose grey gown was easily lost sight of among the branches ;—then he quickened his pace, and came forward eagerly.

"You here," he said, "Mary ? I thought I should be too early for you," and held out both his hands for her.

"I was so much surprised,—so anxious to know what it was. I have been out for nearly an hour, I think," said Mary. "I could not sleep."

"Did I startle you ?" said Ben. "Not half so much, I am sure, as I was startled myself. But if I have made you uneasy I will never forgive myself," he went on, looking closely into her face.

What could have made that difference in his look ? He had always been kind,—certainly he had always been kind,—but he had never looked at her before in that wistful, anxious way. He had been protecting, superior, affectionate ; but such was not his expression now. "Oh, it does not matter !" said Mary ; "but, of course, since it is something important enough to bring you from town like this,—and at this hour—Tell me, please, and put me out of pain."

What he did was to draw her arm closely through his own. "Come this way," he said, "I don't want to be seen or interrupted. There is a corner down here where we shall be quite safe. It was very good of you, Mary, to come."

"Oh, Ben," she cried, "don't talk so, you frighten me! You never were so gentle, so soft to me before. Tell me what it is? It must be something terrible to make you look like this. What is wrong?"

"I don't know if there is anything wrong," he said. "It depends upon your feelings altogether, Mary; only I never had thought of,—anything of the kind,—never! It came upon me like a thunder-clap. To be sure, I might have known. You could not but be as sweet and as pleasant in the eyes of others as you were in mine!"

"Ben, don't talk riddles, I entreat of you," said Mary. "I cannot make this out to-day. A shadow would frighten me to-day. I have had too much to bear,—too much—"

"Sit down here," he said, tenderly; "you must not be frightened. There is nothing to hurt you. It is only me that it can hurt. Mary, Hillyard came to me yesterday, and said,—I suppose by this time you must know what he said?"

"Yes," she answered, first with a violent blush, and then growing suddenly hot.

"Of course, I ought to have known it," said Ben. "I used to read him your letters, like an ass, never thinking. I was furious yesterday; I thought it presumption and insolence. But, of course, that was nonsense. The man is as good as I am. The fact is, I suppose I thought that no other man but myself had any right to think of you."

"Ben!" Mary cried, trembling with a sudden passion, "you never thought of me! How can you say so? Or what is it you would have me understand? I feel as if you were mocking me,—and yet you would not come all this way, surely, to mock me!"

"Then, I did not think at all," he went on, without any direct answer. "I felt that no man had any right,—and I was a fool for thinking so. Mary, the fact is, it ought to be you and I."

"What ought to be you and I?" she faltered, lost in confusion and amazement.

He was standing before her, not lover-like, but absorbed, pressing his subject, and paying no special regard to her. "It ought to be you and I to build up the old house. No. I cannot think any man has a right to come in and interfere. But only just there is this one thing to be said. Whatever is for your happiness, Mary, I will carry out with all my might. If you should set your heart on one thing or another, it shall be done; but still that does not affect the question,—it ought to be you and me."

"For what?" she asked again.

"For what? Oh, for more than I can tell," said Ben; "to build up this old house, as I told you,—to get through life. I must always have felt it, though I did not know. And here is this fellow come in with his wild backwoods way, and thinks he can win you off-hand.

I don't say a word if it is for your happiness ; but I know it should be you and me."

And then there was a pause, and Ben walked up and down the little vacant space in front of the seat he had placed her in, with his eyes bent on the ground, and his face moody and full of trouble. As for Mary, she sat and gazed at him, half-conscious only, worn out by excitement and wonder, and the succession of shocks of one kind and another which she had been receiving, but with a soft sense of infinite ease and consolation stealing over her confused heart. It was that relief from pain which feels to the sufferer like positive blindness. She had not even known how deep the pain in her was until she felt it stealing in upon her,—this ineffable ease and freedom from it, which is more sweet than actual joy.

"Ben," she said at last, when she could get breath, "it is very difficult for me to follow you, and you confuse me so that I don't know. But, about Mr. Hillyard you are all wrong. I never saw him till Monday. I never thought about him at all. I was very sorry. But it is not as if I could blame myself. I was not to blame."

"To blame! How could you be to blame?" said Ben, and he came and stood before her again, gazing at her with that strange look, which Mary did not recognise in him, and could not meet.

"I should never have mentioned it to any one," she said. "I would not now, though you question me so. But only it is best you should not have anything on your mind. Is,—that,—all?" It was not coquetry which suggested the question; it was her reason that began utterly to fail her. She did not seem to know what it was he had said besides,—though he had said something.

"Ah!" he cried vehemently, and then paused and subdued himself, "all except my answer, Mary," he said, softly stooping over her.

"Your answer? You have not asked me anything. Oh, Ben," she cried, suddenly getting up from her seat, with her cheeks burning and her eyes wet, "let there be no more of this. It was all the feeling of the moment. You thought something had happened which never, never could happen, and you felt a momentary grudge. Don't tell me it was anything else. Do you think I forget what you told me once up at the beech about her?" Mary cried, waving her hand towards the Willows. "You did not mean to tell me; but I knew. And the other day—When you say this sort of thing to me it is unkind of you; it is disrespectful to me. I have my pride like other women. Let us speak no more of it, but say good-bye, and I shall go home."

"Then you do not even think me worthy of an answer?" said Ben; and the two stood confronting each other in that supreme duel and conflict of the two existences about to become one, which never loses its interest; she flushed, excited, suspicious; he steadily keeping to his point, refusing to be led away from it. And why

Mary should have resisted, standing thus wildly at bay,—and why, when she could stand no longer, she should have sunk down on the seat from which she had risen, in a passion of tears, is more than I can tell. But that, finally, Ben did get his answer, and that it was, as anybody must have foreseen, eminently satisfactory to him at last, is a matter about which there can be no doubt. I do not know even whether he offered any explanations, or justified himself in the matter of Millicent. I am inclined to think, indeed, that at that moment he took no notice of it whatever; but only insisted on that reply, which, when nature was worn out and could stand against it no longer, came at last. But the victor did go into certain particulars, as with Mary's arm drawn closely through his he led her again up that bank which, in so much excitement and uncertainty, half-an-hour before he had led her down.

"I can't tell you the fright I was in yesterday," he said. "It suddenly flashed upon me in a moment how mad I had been. To leave you here so long, open to any assault, and to be such an ass as to bring a man down who had eyes in his head, and was not an idiot!"

"I wish you would not swear," said Mary. "The strange thing is that you should like me, and yet think me of so small account that any man,—a man I had only known for three days——"

"Hush!" he said, drawing her to him. "When a man's eyes are opened first to the thought that another man has gone off express to rob him of his jewel, do you think he pauses to be reasonable?" and then they looked at each other and were silent, there being more expression in that than in speech.

"But the jewel was no jewel till yesterday," said Mary, making the kind of objection which women love to make, "and who knows but it may be paste to-morrow?"

"My dear," said Ben, "my only woman in the world! might not a man have been beguiled to follow a Will-o'-the-wisp till he cursed and hated such lights, and chose darkness instead,—and then all at once wake up to see that his moon had risen, and that the night was safe and sweet as day?"

I suppose it was the only bit of poetry which Ben Renton was ever guilty of in his life; and it was perfectly successful. And they went on and continued their walk to the beech tree. Mary's eyes were blind with sweet tears; but then what did it matter? was not he there to have eyes for her, through the winding of the tender morning path. And as they reached the trees, the sunshine burst into the wood all at once with something like a shout of triumph. If it was not a shout, it came to precisely the same thing, and caught a branch here and a twig there, and made it into burnished gold, and lit up the far distance and cloistered shade into all the joyous animation and moving stir of life.

"Must you go now?" Mary said, clinging to him a little closer, "must it still be secret? Is no one to see you now?"

"I must still go away," he said, "no help for that, Mary; but in the meantime, I am going home with you to tell them all about it. I shall still catch my ship if I go by the next train."

He was received with subdued consternation by the household, which jumped instantly to the conclusion that something had happened; but there is an instinct in the domestic mind which is almost infallible in such matters; and before Mrs. Renton had even been told of the unexpected arrival of her son, Davison had said to the housekeeper, "He's come down at the last to settle it all with Miss Mary. Now, didn't I tell you!" and Willis had recorded his opinion that, on the whole, there wasn't nothing to say again it. "A little bit of money never comes amiss," he said; "but she was used bad in the will, never to have no compensation. And, on the whole, I agrees with Ben."

Such was the decision of the house, conveyed in language, kind, if familiar, just five minutes after the entry by the window into the dining-room where the breakfast-table was prepared for the family, of the betrothed pair. Mary's gown was wet with the dew, and she ran up-stairs to change it, leaving Ben alone to receive the greetings of his brothers, who appeared at the same moment. "I thought you couldn't resist coming down again, old fellow, before you left for good," Frank said in her hearing, as she rushed to the covert and sanctuary of her own room. He was not so discriminating as the intelligent community below stairs.

And then, in that strange golden forenoon, which seemed at the same time one hasty moment and a long day, full of events, Mrs. Renton, amazed, found her son again stooping over her, and received the astonishing news. It was some time before she could take it in. "What," she said, "Mary? I will never believe it is Mary. You are making fun of me, Ben."

"It is a great deal better than fun, mother," he said. "I could not go till it was settled; and now there is only ten minutes or so to kiss us and bless us, and thank me for giving you such a daughter. She has been a daughter to you already for so long."

"Of course she has," said the bewildered woman. "Mary! it's like your sister. I can't think it's quite right, do you know, Ben. I should as soon have thought of you marrying Alice, or——"

"Frank might object to that, my dear mother," said Ben.

"But, Mary! You are sure you are not making one of your jokes? And after all, I can't think what you see in her, Ben," Mrs. Renton said with a little eagerness. "She was never very pretty,—not like that beautiful Mrs. Rich, you know, or those sort of women,—and not even very young. She must be seven-and-twenty, if she is a day. Let me see. Frank was born in July, and she in the December

after. She will be seven-and-twenty on her next birthday. And nothing to make up for it!"

"Except that there is nobody else in the world," said Ben, smiling at Mary, who had just come into the room.

"Nobody else in the world! I don't know what you mean. Not to say a word against Mary, but you might have done a great deal better, Ben."

"And so he might, godmamma," said Mary, with the gravity of happiness, though Ben had her hand in his.

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Renton, in perfect good faith, "a great deal better. You always have the sense to see things. If I were you, I would reflect a little longer before I announced it, or did anything more in the matter, Ben."

The answer Ben made to this proposal was to draw his betrothed close to his mother's bedside within his own supporting arms. "Give her a kiss, mamma, and say God bless you," he said, bending down his own face close to Mary's. And the mother, quite confused and bewildered, did as she was told, crying a little, and not knowing what to think. And before any one knew, Ben was gone again, off by express to join the steamer which sailed from Liverpool that night. He had just time; everything belonging to him having gone on before with poor Hillyard, who knew nothing about this morning's expedition. And before noon the episode was all over, and the Frank Rentons once more in the foreground, and Mary reading the newspaper as if such a wild inroad of romance into the midst of reality had never been.

"My dear, it is not that I am not as fond of you,—fonder of you than of anybody," Mrs. Renton said, when poor Mary, for one moment, owing to a paragraph about a shipwreck, fairly broke down; "but it does not seem somehow as if it were quite proper. And we can't shut our eyes to it that he might have done better. It feels as if there was never to be any satisfaction in the boys' marriages. I had a fortune of my own, and so had your grandmother; but everything now is going to sixes and sevens."

"Don't say anything more about it, godmamma," said Mary, with an outburst of pent-up agitation, and the nervous panic that seizes a weakened mind. "Oh, how can we tell what may happen in the meantime? Let us say nothing more till he comes home."

"Well, to be sure, he might change his mind," said Mrs. Renton, as Davison came in with her arrowroot. And for half an hour or so that satisfactory conclusion, and the adding of another teaspoonful of port, on account of the excitement she had been going through, put a stop to the conversation, and gave Mary time to draw breath in peace.

But if the reader of this history hopes to be humoured by a shipwreck at this late period of the narrative, it is a vain expectation. The winds blew, and the sea rose, but Ben Renton got safely out to

Canada, and came safely home. I am sorry to have to say that his last great piece of work did not pay nearly so well as he had expected it to do; and the business, which he made over to Hillyard, was, owing to the state of the colony at that moment of less value than had been anticipated; but at the same time patience alone was wanted to realise all possible hopes. I have been obliged to ask the reader to take Ben's success for granted all along, as it would have been simply impossible to introduce details of engineering enterprise into a work of this description; and, indeed, to tell the truth, I fear I should not have sufficiently understood them to set them forth with any distinctness. But whether Hillyard will have patience, and keep up the energy which Ben put into the business, is a very doubtful matter; and it is just as likely as not that he may turn up again at the old club, which is the only luxury he keeps up, as rough, as insouciant, as careless what becomes of him, as on the first day Ben met him, after the weird of the Rentons had begun. Mary might have made another man of him perhaps; but who knows? Temperament is stronger than circumstance,—stronger than fortune,—stronger even than love.

Ben Renton came home, as I have said, as safely as most men come home from Canada. And everything occurred as it ought to have occurred. I would add that they lived happy ever after, if there had been time to make such a record. But the fact is, that it is too early yet to be historical on that point; and for anything anybody can tell, the Rentons may yet come to be very wretched, and give occasion for other chapters of history; though, in common with all their friends, I sincerely hope not. Benedict Renton of Renton stood for the county of Berks, in the late election, with politics perhaps slightly tinged by his life in the other world, but failed by a few votes, notwithstanding the interest attaching to him,—Berks, like many other counties, being of the opinion that a good steady reliable bumpkin, who will do whatever he is told, is a more satisfactory legislator than a man who has spent his youth in objectionable exercises, such as writing and thinking, and moving about the world. Frank Renton, true soldier and constitutional Tory, is one of those who hold this opinion. But I do not despair of seeing Ben in Parliament yet.

And thus the story ends; being like all stories, no history of life, but only of a bit out of life,—the most amiable bit, the section of existence which the world has accepted as its conventional type of life, leaving all the profounder glooms and the higher lights apart. As in heaven there can be no story-telling of the present, for happiness has no story,—there, perhaps, for the first time, the mouth of the minstrel may be opened to say or sing what is untellable by the frankest voice on earth. But till then we must be content to break off after the fairy chapter of life's beginning, the history of Youth.

WHAT WE HOPE TO LEARN FROM THE APPROACHING SOLAR ECLIPSE.

Two years ago, astronomers were looking anxiously forward to an event which they justly thought likely to prove an epoch in the history of solar research. The great eclipse of August, 1868, was not only remarkable on account of the great extent of the black shadow cast upon the earth by the moon, but also as the first total eclipse during which the powers of the most wonderful instrument of research ever invented by man were to be applied to the phenomena visible at such a time. The coloured prominences which had so long perplexed astronomers could hardly fail, it was considered, to reveal their secret under the searching scrutiny of the spectroscope. What the light-gathering powers of the telescope had failed to explain, the light-sifting qualities of the spectroscope might be expected to interpret,—and that almost at a glance,—precisely as they had resolved so many other questions of interest.

Every one knows how abundantly these expectations were fulfilled. Not at one station only in India were the observers successful in mastering the secret of the coloured prominences, but, by a wonderful piece of good fortune, every single observer who had made arrangements to direct the spectroscope to the solar prominences succeeded in answering the question which had so long perplexed astronomers. From Lieutenant-Colonel Tennant at one Indian station, and from Lieutenant Herschel at another, from Rayet and Jannsen, and from the Prussian astronomers who observed the eclipse at Aden, came the same answer,—the prominences are masses of glowing vapour. A few bright-coloured lines had in an instant taught the great lesson astronomers had been so long waiting for. Had the coloured prominences been mountains, as some had supposed, the spectroscope would have shown the rainbow-tinted streak which speaks of the solid nature of a source of light. Had they been clouds suspended in the solar atmosphere, there would have been seen the rainbow streak crossed by dark lines, corresponding to that structure. But, because they consist of glowing gas, the rainbow-tinted background was wanting; and only a few bright-coloured lines, corresponding to the particular gases present in these mighty flames, were seen along the spectral range.

Then followed one of those strange coincidences which the history of science has so often presented. Jannsen, one of the observers of the eclipse, was struck by the thought that since the light from

the prominences is thus gathered up,—concentrated, so to speak,—into a few bright lines, it might be possible to see those lines even when the sun is not eclipsed. It is easy to see why this might be possible. The prominences shine faintly when compared with the solar disc; and so, if we use darkening glasses in observing the latter, we obliterate their light altogether. Nay, even if we absolutely get rid of the direct sunlight, yet we cannot see the prominences. The Astronomer-Royal tried the experiment long since. He placed a card, out of which a circular aperture had been cut, in such a way that the image of the sun, formed by a powerful telescope, would have been visible in the place whence the card-circle had been removed,—the image just filling that space. Under the actual arrangement, however, the light passed through the aperture, and was received into a black bag, where it was quenched. Now, it might have been supposed that by this ingenious method the image of the prominences would have been rendered visible all round the circular aperture. But the glare from the illuminated air was much more than sufficient to obliterate all traces of them. And so it might seem that no means we could adopt would render the prominences visible. But it occurred to Janssen that since the spectroscope turns the solar light into a long streak,—which can be made as dim as we please by increasing its length,—while the same instrument turns the prominence-light into a few bright lines,—which are unchangeable in brightness,—it might be possible to see these lines after sufficiently reducing the light of the rainbow-tinted solar streak. He tried this the day after the eclipse, and found that it was so; he could distinctly see the prominence-lines even when the sun was shining with full splendour.

Janssen sent news of this discovery to Europe, and on a certain day, nearly two months after the eclipse, the letter announcing the discovery was placed in the hands of the President of the Imperial Academy at Paris. Five minutes before, however, the president had read a communication from Mr. Warren De La Rue, announcing that an English observer had lighted independently upon the same discovery.

Let us briefly indicate how this had come about, premising that what we have yet to learn from future eclipses is so intimately associated with the history of what we have already learned, that it would be impossible rightly to present the hopes of astronomers respecting the eclipse of next December without considering the progress of past research.

Mr. Huggins, the eminent spectroscopist, had in 1866 examined the light of a star which blazed out suddenly in the constellation of the Northern Crown. He had found that this star owed its great increase of lustre to an outburst of hydrogen flames; for he could distinctly see the bright lines belonging to the spectrum of glowing

hydrogen, superposed on the rainbow-tinted streak crossed by dark lines, forming the ordinary spectrum of a star.

It occurred to Mr. Lockyer that if the spectrum of a glowing gas can thus be recognised in the case of a distant star, we might be able to detect masses of glowing gas on our sun, which is relatively so near to us; so that, if the prominences are of this nature,—as many astronomers even at that time thought probable,—we might be able to see their spectral lines even when the sun is not eclipsed. He confidently directed the attention of the Royal Society to this method of observation, and urged them to grant a sum for the construction of a suitable spectroscope. With the usual generosity of the Royal Society, such a sum was placed at Mr. Lockyer's disposal. The problem of making a spectroscope which would adequately lengthen out the solar spectrum was successfully solved by Mr. Browning, the eminent scientific optician; and, finally, some two months after the eclipse of 1868 Mr. Lockyer tried the powers of the new instrument thus placed in his possession. As already mentioned, the bright-coloured lines of the prominences were distinctly seen with the new spectroscope; and although Jannsen's similar observations had been made nearly two months earlier, no question rests on the independent nature of Mr. Lockyer's observation. Indeed, so successfully had Mr. Browning mastered the optical difficulties of the problem, that no doubt whatever can exist that Mr. Lockyer would have been successful, altogether independently of the information afforded him, in the actual case, by the eclipse observations of August, 1868.

But now let us see the position in which spectroscopists stood. The new mode of observing the prominences presented no special difficulties,—at least, what difficulties there were referred to the optician rather than the astronomer. Given a telescope of adequate power; armed with a spectroscope spreading out sufficiently the rainbow-tinted streak which forms the solar spectrum, and it became at once possible for any tolerably well-trained observer to make a series of such researches as, twenty years ago, no man of science would probably have believed to be possible. The visibility of a certain set of bright lines would demonstrate not only the existence of a prominence of a particular height at one part of the solar disc, but the nature of the gases of which that prominence was constituted. Nay, so far as the existence of a prominence was concerned, one line alone would suffice for the observer's purpose.

But now new results of extreme importance began to be obtained.

One of the first of these was the confirmation of a theory which had been put forward by Father Secchi several years ago. This eminent observer, making use of a particular mode of viewing the sun, had detected signs of the existence all over the sun's surface of a layer of the same coloured matter which forms the prominences. Combining these indications with the observations he had made

during the total eclipse of 1860, he asserted with great, but not unjustified confidence, his belief in the actual existence of this envelope. "The observation of eclipses," he remarks, "furnishes indisputable evidence that the sun is really surrounded by a layer of this red matter, of which we commonly see no more than the elevated points."

Now the new mode of research was admirably suited to test the views of Father Secchi. In searching around the solar disc, Mr. Lockyer could only here and there find traces of the existence of prominences; but all round the disc he found short bright lines close to the disc's edge, indicating beyond all question that Father Secchi had been right, and that there really exists all over the bright surface of the sun a gaseous envelope, corresponding, though not absolutely identical in structure, with the prominences. Mr. Lockyer gave this envelope the title of the chromosphere, and it would seem no undeserved compliment to the acuteness of one of the most indefatigable of modern astronomers, that this envelope should be known in future by the name of Secchi's chromosphere.*

We have said that this envelope is not actually identical in structure with the prominences. It is, in fact, more complicated. Only certain gaseous elements of the chromosphere seem capable of rising to the enormous height attained by the prominences. In these great masses the principal element is hydrogen, but in the chromosphere many elements are commonly recognised,—such as sodium, magnesium, barium, iron, &c.,—while under favourable circumstances, the bright lines in the chromosphere are so numerous as to indicate the presence of quite a large proportion of the elements which exist in the sun's substance.

But then other modes of research with the spectroscope came into operation. Mr. Lockyer entered into an alliance with Dr. Frankland, one of the most eminent physicists of the day, and very quickly the wisdom and advantage of this course were manifested. It is one of the most promising characteristics of spectroscopic research, that work done in the laboratory becomes available to tell us of the structure of orbs many millions of miles away from us. Dr. Frankland soon obtained results which supplied most important information respecting the solar constitution. It had been shown long since by Plücker and Hittorf, that the bright lines which form the spectrum of hydrogen and other gases vary in appearance according to the circumstances of pressure, temperature, and so on under which the gases give out their light. Here was at once a powerful means of inquiring into the condition of the gases forming the solar envelope. Dr. Frankland was able to confirm the researches of Plücker and Hittorf, and further—he went far towards proving that pressure is

* We write thus with perfect knowledge that other astronomers had yet earlier suspected the existence of the chromosphere.

the chief circumstance affecting the appearance of the bright lines of hydrogen and other gases. He showed, too, that with a great diminution of pressure some of the bright lines disappear.

Now, turning to the sun, Mr. Lockyer was able through these researches to form at least a probable opinion respecting the pressure at which the hydrogen forming the solar prominences in reality exists. He found that the bright lines are so narrow as to indicate a singularly low pressure,—considering the enormous force with which the sun attracts his atmospheric envelope,—a pressure actually less, indeed, than that of our own atmosphere. He could trace also the elevations at which some of the lines of the various elements forming the solar atmosphere vanish,—the others remaining,—and so by comparison with Dr. Frankland's elaborate researches, could tell at least with some probability what is the actual pressure at different heights in the solar atmosphere. It was, in fact, much as though an observer on the sun could see our barometric columns standing at a height of thirty inches at the sea-level, and at lesser and lesser heights at greater and greater elevations. Precisely as such an observer, supposing him to be acquainted with the nature of the barometric column, could tell the circumstances of pressure at different heights in our atmosphere, so Mr. Lockyer, knowing the gases which form the chromosphere, and informed by Frankland's researches of the interpretation of the vanishing of bright lines, could tell the variations of pressure at different heights in the solar atmosphere.

We have said, however, that the result was not absolutely certain. It is easy to see why this is. Temperature has an undoubted effect upon the bright lines belonging to the gaseous spectra, and it is obvious that the heat throughout the solar atmosphere must far surpass any which our chemists can artificially produce in their laboratory experiments. So that it must still remain open to some question whether we can reason quite so confidently respecting the condition of things in the sun's neighbourhood, as we might if such peculiar relations did not necessarily exist there.

But at present it seems at least a probable inference that the gases forming the prominences are not subjected to very great pressure. And this brings us to the consideration of the phenomena which will undoubtedly occupy the chief attention of observers during the approaching total eclipse of the sun. When the sun is quite concealed from view by the interposing moon, there springs suddenly into view a crown of glory all round the moon's black disc, which has for centuries perplexed astronomers. This appearance,—the solar corona, as it is called,—had been supposed until quite recently to be a solar atmosphere, other interpretations having one by one been abandoned. But then, the corona extends in appearance to a distance at least half as great as the moon's apparent

diameter from the lunar disc. So that if in reality it is due to a solar atmosphere, that atmosphere must be at least half the sun's diameter in altitude,—that is, upwards of four hundred thousand miles high. Now our own atmosphere is probably not more than one hundred miles high, so that the solar atmosphere,—assuming the view we are considering to be correct,—would be no less than four thousand times as high as ours; and on this account alone the pressure at its base would enormously exceed the pressure of the air we breathe. But this is not all. The pressure of our air is due wholly to the earth's attraction, and would be increased or diminished if the earth's attractive force were increased or diminished. Now the sun exerts an attractive force so vastly exceeding that exerted by the earth, that if a man could be placed at the sun's surface,—remaining uninjured by all other circumstances,—he would be crushed flat by his own weight. We can see, therefore, that the atmosphere of the sun would have its pressure enormously increased through this cause also. Combining the two causes, it is not too much to say that the pressure at the sun's surface, under such an atmosphere as we have been supposing, would suffice to liquify if not to solidify the most subtle gases we are acquainted with.

There cannot be any question therefore that the spectroscopic observation of the sun has sufficed to throw very great doubt indeed upon the theory that the corona is due to a solar atmosphere. Or rather we may fairly say that that theory has been distinctly shown by Dr. Frankland's laboratory researches to be untenable.

But then there remains the difficulty of explaining what the corona really is. We know that it cannot be a lunar atmosphere, because a number of very exact observations have shown, beyond all possibility of question, that the moon has no atmosphere of appreciable extent, far less such an atmosphere as would account for the corona. Again, the theory which was put forward by De Lisle in the seventeenth century, that the corona is caused by the diffraction of the sun's rays as they pass by the moon, has been disproved by the inquiries of Sir David Brewster.

There is indeed another theory, which has,—strangely enough,—been exhumed quite recently. According to this theory the solar corona is simply a phenomenon belonging to our own atmosphere. The theory was first mentioned,—though only to be summarily rejected,—by Halley, and touched on somewhat contemptuously by other astronomers. It explains the corona as due to the illumination of the upper regions of the air by the sun's rays. We know that if we hide the sun with a globe or disc of any sort, a strong light is seen all round the interposed object. And it might seem that since the moon is but a globe somewhat larger than our experimental one, and somewhat farther off, we ought to see a similar light all round the black disc of the eclipsing moon.

But a little consideration will show the fallacy of this reasoning.

When we hold a globe so as just to hide the sun, we do not throw into shadow those upper regions of air from which the atmospheric glare really comes. But when the moon conceals the sun during total eclipse, she causes an enormous shadow to fall right through the whole depth of the air. This shadow, even at its narrowest, that is where it reaches the earth, has been in many total eclipses fully one hundred miles wide; and as the part of the air capable of reflecting solar light to an appreciable extent is shown by the twilight-arch to be but forty or fifty miles high at the outside, we see that in the case of such eclipses, the moon's shadow in the air is of a vast drum-shaped figure, at least twice as wide as it is high. It is most obvious, then, that to an eye placed at the centre of the vast base of this drum-shaped shadow, no light can possibly come from the air for a wide range all round the place of the eclipsed sun. Imagine a shadow hiding nearly all England and fifty miles high; then to an eye placed, say at Hereford, the upper surface of the shadow would cover an enormous extent of sky, while the eclipsed sun, at the apparent centre of that surface, would be but as a relatively minute circle.

It need hardly be said that considerations so obvious have not escaped the attention of astronomers. We have said that Halley rejected the atmospheric glare theory, and that other astronomers have spoken of it with but little respect. In quite recent times, competent astronomers, who have had occasion to examine it, have in like manner rejected it. Dr. Harkness, who witnessed the American eclipse, and was led by the study of the corona,—as actually seen,—to inquire into the physical nature of the phenomenon, remarks respecting the theory, that “the moon's shadow, at the point where it enters the earth's atmosphere, usually has a diameter of one hundred miles or more, and if it were possible for an observer placed within that shadow to see the illumination of the atmosphere outside of it, the appearance presented would be that of a halo having an interior diameter much greater than the size of the moon.” Dr. Curtis, also,—a skilful mathematician,—after exhibiting precisely the same line of reasoning, remarks that “it is geometrically impossible for an observer near the centre of the shadow to see any portions of our atmosphere which lie beyond the cone of darkness,—which portions alone could, of course, under any circumstances be illuminated,—in apparent contiguity with the moon's disc.”

Thus we are brought back to the theory that the corona really is a solar phenomenon, while yet we are precluded from supposing that it is a solar atmosphere. What, then, can it be?

Now astronomers hope for much, and for very useful information respecting the corona, during the progress of the eclipse of next December; and the question may suggest itself, how far it is wise

to discuss the subject of the corona now, when in a few months we may be in so much more advantageous a position for theorising respecting it.

This is a consideration well worth dwelling upon; yet the arguments by which we are to deal with it are sufficiently simple. If we have already exhausted all means of inquiry applicable to what we already know respecting the corona, then our proper course is to wait. It would undoubtedly be absurd in that case to attempt to evolve from the depths of our moral consciousness a theory respecting this wonderful and mysterious phenomenon.

But in truth there is little fear of our thus over-riding observation. In these days observation progresses with such amazing rapidity that reasoning is left far in the rear. It is not too much to assert that if all observation were from this moment to cease, the students of science would find abundant employment for a decade of years, at least, to come, in examining and utilising the observations which have been already made.

Let us, then, look round our storehouse, and see if we may not at once, and almost at random as it were, light upon a few observations which may serve to help us in interpreting the wonders of the corona.

A few months ago Captain Noble was looking at the planet Venus when almost directly between us and the sun. She was so placed with respect to the sun that, had his globe been eclipsed, she would have been seen near the edge of the coronal light. Of course her unilluminated side was turned towards us. It appeared darker than the background on which it was projected. Whence came that light which illumined the background? Or rather, what light was it which the globe of Venus concealed? Something beyond Venus undoubtedly, —else how could she conceal it? Obviously, then, there is some light where we see the corona when the sun is eclipsed, and that light comes from a region farther off than Venus is when nearest to us. Here is another evidence to strengthen our conviction that the corona is an extra-terrestrial phenomenon, supposing any faint doubts to remain after the evidence already adduced.

We have gone to Venus, seemingly so little associated with the corona, for evidence respecting that phenomenon. Turn we now to other objects which seem at first sight even less likely to give us any information.

Consider thoughtfully the meteor which flashes across the dark background of the sky at night. We know now quite certainly that every falling star has travelled before reaching our atmosphere along an orbit of enormous dimensions. It has been proved further, respecting all the meteors whose real path has been determined, that their orbits are very eccentric, insomuch that though they cross the earth's path, —otherwise, of course, we should never see them, — they pass out to distances exceeding in some cases those at which

Uranus and Neptune pursue their wide career. We may conclude, then, of far the greater number of the meteors the earth encounters, that their paths, having their most distant portions so much farther from the sun than our earth, must have their nearest part,—to the sun,—much closer to the sun than the earth is. So that if meteors were as large as planets, it would necessarily happen that many meteors belonging to systems which the earth encounters would be seen, at certain seasons, shining close by the sun.

But, as a matter of fact, meteors are individually far too minute to be thus seen; nor could all the meteor systems traversed by the earth become visible by the combined lustre of their components.

It is clear, however, that the meteor systems traversed by the earth can be but a few among the meteor systems actually existing, and having paths carrying their components nearer to the sun than the earth is. Taking at random any such path, the chance that the earth's path would cross it is indefinitely small; so that clearly an indefinite number of such systems must exist in order that the earth might have a fair chance of encountering a single one. And since she actually encounters more than a hundred, it will be seen how enormous must be the real number of systems actually existing.

This mode of reasoning, though in strict accordance with recognised and certain principles, may not seem convincing at first sight. But, in reality, it will be found that we quite commonly, and as it were unconsciously, follow the guidance of the principle in ordinary life. We are out walking, suppose, and a drop of rain falls upon us; now, there is no absolute reason why a single drop falling from the sky should not light upon us; yet so certain are we that the odds against such an event are enormous, that we conclude at once that rain is falling over a wide space all around us. Or, again, suppose we meet some day five or six persons dressed in a peculiar costume, and not forming one party,—we conclude at once that there is to be some gathering of such persons on the day in question. And so in a thousand instances which will occur to every one.

We conclude, then, with the utmost confidence that for every meteor system encountered by the earth there must be thousands which she does not encounter.

And these multitudinous systems, illuminated as they must be by the sun's rays, might very reasonably be expected to become visible under favourable circumstances,—as, for example, when the sun is eclipsed. Nay, knowing that the meteors travel in paths resembling those of comets, and in some cases associated in the most intimate manner with the paths of known comets,—we may conclude that large numbers of meteors pass as close to the sun as some comets have been observed to do, or even nearer, for observed comets form but a small proportion of the total number of such objects. Now, Sir John Herschel has shown that the comet of 1843 passed so close

to the sun that it must have been subjected to a heat exceeding three and a half times that obtained by means of Parker's great lens, which melted such refractory substances as cornelian, agate, and rock-crystal. Meteors so close as this to the sun would be so intensely heated that their inherent light would be even more brilliant than that which they would be capable of reflecting. Many would even be vaporised as they rushed past the point of their nearest approach to the solar orb. We see then that, quite apart from the information which a solar eclipse affords us, we really have just reason for pronouncing with considerable confidence that something very like what the corona appears to be must exist in the sun's neighbourhood.

Now it is well worth noticing that if we suppose the corona really to be caused by the illuminated meteoric systems, we get rid at once of that difficulty which spectroscopic analysis opposed to the theory that the corona is a solar atmosphere. These swiftly rushing meteors would no more tend to increase the pressure at the base of the solar atmosphere than the moon, circling as she does round the earth, tends to increase our own atmospheric pressure.

It happens, too, that such evidence as has hitherto been given by the spectroscope respecting the actual constitution of the corona corresponds very satisfactorily with the conclusions above deduced. We do not enter here into a very particular account of that evidence,—first, because the observations made by different astronomers have not yet been brought into complete accordance; and secondly, because it is confidently hoped that the approaching eclipse observations will make abundantly clear that which is at present somewhat confused. But the very diversity of results corresponds with the diverse character of the light which comes,—according to the above results,—from the meteoric systems near the sun. Meteors simply reflecting solar light would exhibit the rainbow-tinted streak crossed by multitudinous dark lines, which forms the solar spectrum; meteors incandescent through intensity of heat would exhibit a rainbow-tinted spectrum without dark lines; and lastly, meteors vaporised by heat would exhibit a spectrum of bright lines. The combination of such spectra in varying proportions would quite satisfactorily account for the results hitherto observed by spectroscopists. It is, however, worth noticing that electrical discharges exerted by the sun's action, and taking place between the meteors, would even more completely account for observed results; and perhaps it is only because electricity has come to be regarded as a sort of refuge for the scientific destitute, that men of science have been hitherto unwilling to resort to such an explanation of what has been observed.

But astronomers hope that during the eclipse of next December the spectroscope will be applied much more effectually than has yet been done to the scrutiny of the solar corona. Photography, too, it is hoped, will be so applied as to exhibit the corona, and not merely,

as hitherto, the pink prominences and the more brilliant part of the glare around the sun. Then the polariscope is to be applied, though for our own part, we have very little faith in the possibility that this instrument can give intelligible and reliable results respecting such a phenomenon as the corona would appear to be. If its light really is of the mixed nature we have described, it can scarcely be but that the polariscopic teachings will be discordant and practically unmeaning.

Last, but not least, a large array of observers have devoted themselves to the scrutiny of the general features of the eclipse. We wish very strongly to indicate the opinion that much remains to be done in this way. It seems to us that in all the eclipses hitherto observed, attention has been somewhat too exclusively directed to the eclipsed sun and its immediate neighbourhood. We write this in the full knowledge of the meteorological and other observations which have been made during eclipses. The class of observation which, as it seems to us, has been insufficiently attended to, includes the special study of the varying illumination of the sky, not near the sun, but at all orders of distance from him. Remembering that we know the actual figure, dimensions, and position, from second to second, of that vast shadow-cone which the moon projects upon our atmosphere, we can interpret in a very satisfactory manner the apparent changes of illumination in different regions of the sky. From such observations, properly made and studied, more could be learned, we do not hesitate to say, respecting the height of the air, the quality of its upper and unattainable regions, and other like subjects, than from all the methods by which as yet men of science have attempted to master these stubborn problems.

It must not be forgotten, however, that the eclipse will last,—as far as totality is concerned,—for a very brief time. For about two minutes,—the exact time cannot be known until the observing stations are decided upon,—the sun will be totally hidden from view; and whatever new information is to be obtained respecting the constitution of the corona, and about other subjects which will occupy the attention of observers, must be gleaned in that short interval of time. Those at home must not be surprised or disappointed, therefore, if the results actually obtained should seem at first sight disproportioned to the expense and trouble involved by the expeditions, or to the number of persons who will take part in the work of observation. Science must be content in such cases to expend a large amount of time and trouble where yet the prospect of remuneration will be but small. All the more credit, we say, to those who are ready to join in an enterprise so arduous, and presenting so many chances of failure.

THE ENGLISH ASPECT OF THE WAR.

WHEN we first learned in England that the trumpery affair of the Hohenzollern candidature for the throne of Spain had given occasion to the French Emperor to declare war against Prussia, and that this occasion had been grasped although the German prince had, at the first expression of French displeasure, withdrawn his claim, our national feeling was undoubtedly one of intense anger against the Emperor. It was felt that he was subjecting a great portion of Europe to the cruel persecution of war with no other object than that of retrieving for himself the personal power which he had lately jeopardised by certain misunderstood and ill-arranged political concessions. He had made those concessions without understanding what would be their effect upon his own position; he had then perceived, clearly enough, that, having let the reins fall from his hands, he could recover his hold of them only by military success; and in these circumstances, whatever may have been his scruples of conscience in having recourse to so terrible a remedy, he had resolved "to cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war," with the sole view of re-establishing himself and of leaving a throne to his son. For one who would sin after such a fashion as this,—who could sacrifice the lives and fortunes of thousands, and the comfort and well-being of millions, to an idea of personal aggrandisement,—there could be in England no forgiveness and no excuse.

On the score of many years of approved loyalty to his alliance with Great Britain,—a loyalty which had shown that he at least among Frenchmen had believed in the stability of England and the constancy of Englishmen,—the crime by which the third Napoleon achieved his throne had been condoned among us, and he had, if we may use such a phrase, lived down his sins in our eyes. The gradually altered expressions of our public press from the commencement of his empire to the beginning of the present war, prove that this has been the general condition of the British mind in reference to the Emperor. But the declaration of war against Prussia, sent forth without any cause assigned,—or rather with causes assigned so trivial and so untrue that in the judgment of Englishmen they had better have been altogether omitted,—was in itself a crime against humanity. All the man's merits towards ourselves were,—not forgotten,—but necessarily set aside, and the Emperor lost at a blow, not the alliance of England, but the friendship of Englishmen. The alliance of two nations,—the diplomatically cordial relations of

which we so often hear,—may co-exist with the bitterest feelings of national hatred. Six weeks since the friendly relations between England and France were not merely diplomatic. They were national also. We think that there can be no doubt that before war was declared, the normal Frenchman was dearer to us than the normal Prussian; but, as soon as the hateful news had reached us, all this was changed.

Nevertheless, for a while, for a few days,—and events now come and go so fast that we can count our periods by days only,—there was a general feeling that in no circumstances should England allow herself to be drawn into the war. It was not at all probable that either of the belligerents would interfere with property that was absolutely British, or put a foot upon soil that appertained to Great Britain. In this war we might happily be safe, and might take care that our political captains and pilots did not allow our barque to drift into the war gulf. In former days we had done enough for the benefit and tranquillity of others,—and had done it too exclusively at our own cost. Let us now be careful to stand discreetly aloof and foster our commerce,—so that we might be affected as lightly as possible by the tumult arising around us. Such was our first resolution. Since that we have, by a new and express treaty, committed ourselves to the protection of a kingdom in Europe, which from its geographical position and the aspiration of the belligerents, would have become the natural battle-field of France and Prussia had not France and Prussia been deterred by the fear of other nations. And we may safely assert that had not our present Ministry caused some such treaty to be made, and had not they submitted to Parliament the propriety of renewing the responsibility of the nation in regard to Belgium, they could not have retained their places to the close of the Session which has now expired.

We all know how lukewarm in the first instance was Mr. Gladstone when questioned on this subject, and how he expressed almost a horror of an armed neutrality; how Mr. Bernal Osborne, seizing the public opinion of the moment, gathered laurels by advocating the duty of England in regard to Belgium; and how Lord Granville made good in the House of Lords the deficiency of Mr. Gladstone in the House of Commons. We are now bound to go to war, if need be, on account of that happy little kingdom which seemed to become half English when Leopold went from Claremont to superintend its destinies, and have altogether silenced those preachers of peace-doctrine, whose preachings have for many years past been so powerful among us. The same preachers were silenced after the same fashion in 1854, when the whole nation flung itself into war for the protection of Turkey. Who does not remember the warnings of Mr. Cobden and the threats of Mr. Bright? And who does not also remember the oft-repeated, almost national assertion, that war for

England under any circumstances other than those of actual aggression on ourselves, would be madness? This feeling was so strong, and the preachings of the preachers were so eloquent, that they who were least actuated by the feeling and most indignant at the preachings could only cry *Ichabod*, and say the glory of England was gone. Nevertheless, when the affair of the Dano-German duchies was disturbing Europe, the British sympathy with Danish interest was only just not strong enough to hurry us into war. We were not quite sure that Denmark had a right to claim dominion over the German-speaking Holsteiners, nor was it altogether clear to us that the Holsteiners and German Schleswigers desired to belong to Denmark;—and we abstained. With many among us after that there was no cry possible but that cry of *Ichabod*. With many others again, of quite the opposite party, there was a double assurance that England would abstain from participation in all future European wars. But now, if a hostile foot were placed on Belgium, we should undoubtedly go to war for her protection, although no British interests would be compromised. And we should do so, not in obedience to the dictates of a ministry the members of which might possibly be actuated by royal desires, but because the country has plainly insisted that it should be so. As an immediate consequence of this national resolution we have already voted increased sums for arms and soldiers. We have forced from the chiefs of our war departments explanations and detailed statements as to our resources, and we are already in full activity in our military workshops.

In looking for the immediate cause of this strong expression of public feeling, we must acknowledge that it arose, when it did arise, from the publication in the "*Times*" newspaper of a certain skeleton treaty,—project of a treaty as it has been called,—which implied that at some late date, supposed to be about the time of the affair of Luxemburg, or a little after that, in 1867, France and Prussia were conspiring together for a new partition of territory in Europe, and that under this treaty France was to be allowed to "*annex*" Belgium. This appeared in the "*Times*," as revealed by Count Bismarck in order that Englishmen might know how treacherous to English interests had been their great and loyal ally the Emperor. It had been sent with the obvious view of creating animosity to the Emperor in England at a moment in which such animosity might be seriously prejudicial to him. No doubt the paper did come direct from Count Bismarck, and was probably communicated to the "*Times*" by the Prussian Minister in London. It has been substantiated by positive proof, and is not denied. It was written by the French Ambassador at Berlin on French paper, and was handed when so written by the French Ambassador to the Prussian Prime Minister. Whether, as is said by the unfortunate Benedetti, he was cajoled into writing the words of the treaty by Count Bismarck and

wrote them at the Count's dictation, or whether they originated with himself,—or rather with his master the Emperor,—we do not know and need not much care. That there was such a project between France and Prussia is certain; and, looking to the nature of the alliance between ourselves and the Emperor, we regard that in him to be sin specially against ourselves, which on the part of Count Bismarck was simply sin against the world at large. We have never loved the Prussian Prime Minister very dearly; but we had reached a sort of love for the Emperor. Whatever might be his faults to others he was our friend;—and yet in the midst of his friendship with us he was intriguing for the acquisition of a territory which, as he well knew, we could not allow him to absorb without incurring disgrace or war!

Count Bismarck, in sending over the skeleton treaty to the "*Times*" newspaper, was perfectly successful. It did its work rapidly and thoroughly. Not that it has taught us to love him. All such intrigue,—or perhaps we may better call it conspiracy,—as that which was certainly being fostered by himself when the projected treaty was written, is odious to us. No British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs who was known to have done such work would now be tolerated at the head of that department. Such business is picking and stealing in a great way, and requires all the falseness, secrecy, and dishonest dark contriving, which form the mainstay of the rogue's profession. Belgium or Luxemburg is to be filched in the dark, and the filching is to be effected by disguises, falsehoods, and hidden schemes. The little project is detestable whether regarded from the French or from the Prussian side of the argument; and, to give Count Bismarck his due, we must acknowledge that no attempt has been made to gloze over the Prussian part of the intrigue. The great Prussian statesman desired to strike his immediate antagonist heavily, regardless of certain blows which would certainly fall upon himself; and he has struck the blow. In consequence of this, we do not love Count Bismarck the better, but we certainly love Napoleon very much the less.

No doubt the strong expression of resolution on our part to be true to our engagements to Belgium arose at the moment from the excitement which the publication of the projected treaty produced. But the question in a very much larger shape has presented itself to Englishmen since war was declared by France, and renewed speculation has arisen whether assured peace,—peace at any price,—can be a blessing to a nation or to a people. It is the old Quaker theory that no aggression justifies combative defence,—that, let the consequences of not fighting be what they may, no man should fight, even to defend himself. As regards personal intercourse between man and man, that theory has almost died out,—overcome, as rigid Quakers would probably say, by the natural viciousness of man; as others would declare, by the natural manliness of man. But it is

still held up as the future guide for nations ; and by a large party in England it is maintained that the theory should prevail for us, even though it be not honoured by our neighbours. At any rate, let us never fight, unless we ourselves be invaded. The exact extent to which this mild rule should be allowed to govern us,—whether it should exclude us from fighting for Canada or New Zealand, whether it should forbid us to bristle with arms in India, and should or should not prohibit us from keeping a hold on Gibraltar,—is a question of degree among professors and proselytes which we have not room to discuss here ; but undoubtedly the teachers of this doctrine would prohibit us from fighting in Europe for such causes as that which took us to Sebastopol, and that which may take us to Belgium. And this school of teachers are not now dependent on the Quaker doctrine for their main support, though it began its work by dependence on it. War is not only unchristian and vicious, but it is expensive also and ruinous. It destroys commerce, and retards, if it does not for the time annihilate, the progress of civilisation. Had we no past wars to pay for, no present fleets or armies to maintain, a little more than a fifth of our present taxation would pay our way for us, and something like fifty-five millions a year would not be thrown to the winds as it is now thrown. For spilt milk there is no redress ;—but the milk of the future may be kept unspilt for home consumption, if only our people can be made wise enough to enforce wisdom on their rulers. Such are the arguments of the peace-at-any-price party ; and when told of prestige, of national glory, and the like, they answer,—not without much show of reason in their answer,—that national prestige and national glory, or what may perhaps better be called national greatness, will neither feed nor teach the multitude ; that the greatest good for the greatest number should be the desideratum of a Government and a Parliament ; and that those feelings of exaltation in military prowess by which men are actuated when they take a pride in national grandeur, are the possession of comparatively so few among us, that the nation as a nation should not be called upon to maintain them at a cost so great as is always paid for them. Let England pay her way, feed her population, and promote the arts of peace for the benefit of her own people and of all the world. Then let other nations vapour of war till they also shall have learned the good lesson from England's example.

No doubt the picture as so painted is lovely. And it has been so painted as to entice the eyes of many. But yet there are but few who would dare to say that they would like to see England without a navy and an army,—few even who would wish that she should be without an army fit to fight in foreign lands. There is, in the minds even of the most eloquent of the peace professors, a residuum of conviction that England without her colonies, England without India, England, in short, without her power, would not be capable of

realising even for herself that golden age of mingled riches and innocence, of peace, plenty, and political activity, which is the millennium of the Quaker mind. Men will talk when they know that their words cannot prevail to more than a half,—to more than a tenth, probably, of their assumed import,—who would be struck dumb at once were they to be assured that their counsels would be taken. We are told that our taxes lie heavily on us, and we are all prone to believe the assertion. We do know as a fact that in war they are much heavier than in peace. We hate wars, for this reason and for others, and we love peace;—but with all this we are well aware that could we really convince the other nations and convince ourselves that in no case should we go to war to protect any spot of land beyond the shores of our own islands, the shores of our own islands would very soon be little worth protection. If it were not for our national glory, for our prestige, our greatness, our power, our known capacity to resent an injury, and to defend a friend, England would no longer be England for such of us as would have the power to leave it.

We have spoken of the preachings of the peace party. But the croakings of their opponents have been almost as loud. For years past we have been told by these gentlemen that England is no longer worth inhabiting, because the peace-mongers have so talked down all idea of national greatness, as to have destroyed our name for military glory, extinguished our army, and made us a bye-word and a reproach among the nations. There is no longer, we are assured, any respect for England among foreigners, because of the anti-English operations of the peace-mongers. The name of an Englishman is as the name of a dog that can be beaten; and so prone is he to be beaten, that he deserves no better reputation. Then they sing Ichabod, and take what little comfort they can in the rising price of land and the durability of the funds.

And yet we doubt much whether there ever has been, and feel assured that there is not now, any other nation so ready as are we ourselves, to fly to arms on an idea of general justice, or in obedience to promises formerly made by us, and to do so with no view of aggrandisement for ourselves. Twenty years is but as an hour in the life of a nation, and during the last twenty years we have grappled with Russia for the protection of Turkey; we have encountered all the perils and agony of a death-struggle for the salvation of our Indian Empire; we have prepared for immediate war with the United States while demanding that atonement should be made for a national insult; we have sent an entire army to rescue and to avenge two or three British subjects in Abyssinia; and we are now preparing for war, whatever that war may be or with whom, should our dearest and closest friend among the nations require our assistance in the present emergency. So clearly was English opinion spoken in this matter but a few weeks since, that no fear need, we

think, be as yet felt that the peace-mongers have taught us to abandon our national greatness, or to risk the loss of our national prestige.

Such seems to be the existing feeling of England in regard to war in general, and specially in regard to the war which is now being waged on the Rhine. When our promise was made the other day to Belgium, there had been neither French nor Prussian successes. The first actual blow had not been struck, and it seemed to be hardly probable that the war should be so restricted from its commencement to its end as to leave the territory of Belgium altogether unmolested. It was the belief of all men here, founded on their confidence in French administration, that whatever might be the final result of the war, a series of first successes must attend the French arms. It now seems that this confidence was misplaced, and that the boasts which France has made as to her readiness for war, have been misplaced. That M. Rouher's congratulations to the Emperor and to the Empire were injudicious when he asserted that four years of constant preparation for this war had ensured the success of France, all men felt; but that they were vain and ill-grounded no Englishman believed. When M. Ollivier told us of the light heart with which he, as the Emperor's Prime Minister, began the war, we did not like the expression as connected with the shedding of so many rivers of blood; but we did think that, as regarded the first few months of the war, there might be justification for the satisfaction on the part of any leading Frenchman who could be light-hearted at such a moment. And afterwards, when Napoleon vouchsafed to inform the world, by means of a published telegram to his child's mother, that he had carried his boy of fourteen into the thick of the fire, where the bullets were falling around him, though we did not imagine that the little Prince would be personally subjected to many of the perils of the contest, we did think that the first baptism at Saarbrück might be the prelude to many similar triumphs on battle-fields of more significance. That France, with her new and vaunted engines of death, should slay hecatombs of Germans, and that then in her glory and pride she should disdain to be limited by any treaties, by any territorial demarcations, was what we all dreaded when we resolved that Belgium should not be allowed to suffer without our aid.

But we have been wrong in our judgment. As these words are written, the French army seems to be utterly demoralised and struck to the heart. We know that Strasbourg and Metz,—two of the strongest places in France,—are besieged or surrounded, and that even food is already wanted in both places. We know that Nancy, the site in time of peace of an immense garrison, has been occupied by the Prussians. The Emperor, threatened with recall, as to whom the word "abdication" has actually become common in men's mouths,—who seems to have proved himself unfit for a commander's work,—has declared that he will return

to Paris only when he is either dead or victorious. Prussia, which was to have been invaded, — as to which we feared that the French troops would have been at Berlin about the time at which the French Emperor did in effect succeed in reaching Metz, — supports her armies on French territory ; and French writers who were so proudly intent on sending their troops into the heart of Germany, now proclaim their intention of avenging the desecration of their own soil by Prussian soldiers, implying thereby their conviction that forcible encroachment on a neighbour is of all national sins the heaviest. Such at this moment is the condition of affairs. Before these words see the light, all this may be changed. A battle may be fought before Châlons which shall drive the Germans back to the Rhine, and the Emperor may have compensated France for the entire wing of an army destroyed, for her lost eagles, and all the terrible first reverses of the war, by the glory of a great victory. Paris may again be submissive, and the immediate aspirations of the republicans may be satisfied with the hope of some great act of French aggression. Such, no doubt, would be the effect of any success on the part of the French army sufficient to redeem the discomfiture which has already been received ; but, at the present moment, judging with such light as the effects of the war have hitherto given us, we cannot think that France will be able to do more than arrange with Prussia for the evacuation of her own territories. If she can do so much, without abandoning some portion of her old acquisitions from Germany, it will be well for her. In such case, — should any final arrangement for the evacuation of France by the German troops be made, and for the peaceable return to Paris of the remainder of the French army, — our assistance will have been tendered to Belgium at a cheap rate, and we shall have done our duty without having been called upon for heavy disbursements in men and treasure in the doing of it. Should the war be so terminated during the present autumn, the contending parties will no doubt retire without having touched Belgian soil, and the munitions of war which we are now preparing in hot haste, will again go into store, there to be destroyed by time, or to be made obsolete by the growing ingenuity of the age.

That it may be so is the prayer of us all. Though our national honour and character for maintaining our engagements is dear to us, we do not desire to go forth to battle in search of glory, — and certainly not with a view to any acquisition. To fight may be a necessity to us, but certainly cannot be a gratification. We do not raise regiments by conscription. We have no *Landwehr*. Every soldier that fights in our ranks, whether he live or die, lives for us or dies for us at a terrible cost to the country. We often wonder whether those three or four Abyssinian captives who have been restored to us, remember that they have been redeemed by the expenditure of above sixty tons of gold. We have rejoiced hitherto at Prussian victories, not only on account of the injustice of France

in beginning the war, but also because we think that Prussian victories may more probably lead to a speedy peace than could be effected were the French to have been successful. With France dominant on both banks of the Rhine, Belgium could hardly keep herself out of the war, and with Belgium we ourselves should be included. We think, too, that for France herself, the real France, France with her forty millions of people,—though not perhaps for the France of the Emperor,—a quick peace, to be purchased at any price to be quickly paid, must be infinitely more beneficent than a war carried on for years throughout Germany in quest of fresh glory, new territory, and rectified boundaries.

For all reasons we hope that the arms of Germany may be successful to the end; but we do not know that we can be justified in expecting that the end will come as yet. Much as we have been mistaken in regard to the readiness of France for this war, into which she has been precipitated by the Emperor, and perhaps by some inner counsel of imperial advisers with whose very names France herself is unacquainted, we do know, or think that we know, that the entire power of France is too great to be broken into shivers by a month's warfare. The normal Frenchman is said to be better at attack than at defence,—and in this instance he has failed in attacking. But he is a gallant fellow,—so gallant that in gallantry none can beat him. And he possesses an intense love for his country, with a feeling that to live otherwise than as one of the greatest is in itself disgraceful. The idea that "*noblesse oblige*," which is the backbone of his character, forces from him great sacrifices. He will endure much before he will yield up his France to foreign dictation. Thinking of him as we do we cannot believe that a quick peace can come from the exercise of German power on French territory, or that Frenchmen will allow Prussians to occupy Paris till the whole nation has been vanquished. Armies will rise, if they rise only to perish, and there will be fighting and slaughter as long as powder and guns remain to them. But there is one method, and probably only one, by which bloodshed and internecine war may be arrested, and that method is the withdrawal of the Emperor. If he were taken from the scene, with acknowledgment on the part of France that he had, by his own power, hurried her on to this unjust war, surely the King of Prussia would retire, with all his Germans, back within the old landmarks.

We can conceive no other possible solution of the affair. In "withdrawing" their Emperor,—in removing him, that is, not only from the command of the French armies, but also from the power of deciding that they shall be commanded to do that or this, it will be for Frenchmen to say,—and perhaps in some degree for him also,—what shall be his future fate. It was but the other day that he proposed to rule France as a "constitutional monarch,"—that is, to put the absolute power of ruling into the hands of responsible

ministers, while he retained to himself the power of selecting his chief minister, in accordance with the will of the majority of the legislative body. Such probably was never his real intention. We do not intend to accuse him of such direct falsehoods as those which brought Charles I. to the scaffold, but it seems that he never truly realised the sacrifice which he was called upon to make. He suggested to himself that a make-believe responsible minister might serve the turn,—a minister who might seem to be responsible, though he himself should retain all political power; and the upshot of that has been the Prussian War. The power was actually slipping out of his hands, and for the recovery of it, for the regaining of France in his own clutch, he had nothing left but military success. The military success is wanting;—and if he be withdrawn, to what can he be withdrawn? It is for the French to say whether they sufficiently love him and his name to give him another chance of filling the throne of a constitutional monarch. We doubt whether there is sufficient sympathy between him and the educated intelligences of France for such a career, if he would be content to accept it. Between him and Frenchmen generally there was at one time the sympathy needed for imperial government;—but imperial government is, it seems, no longer possible for France.

The "Times" said the other day that "personal government has proved to be a rootless thing." We fear that the "Times" in so saying went too far. The throne of a king or monarch ruling by personal government may or may not have roots. The personal government of Nicholas when he had expended all the resources of Russia within the walls of Sebastopol, was not a rootless thing. The failure killed him; but it did not interfere with the personal government of the Russian Empire, because in Russia the thing had roots. Gradual reforms may change the nature of the thing, till the thing itself be gone. But it stands long, and dies slowly,—like the old oak, because it has roots. But of the French Empire the saying is true. The glory of the first Emperor, joined to certain capacities in the present Napoleon or in those associates by whom he was surrounded, together with the state of doubt in regard to political power which has been created in France by the Revolution, have together given to him the power of personal government for a term of years sufficient to justify the world in regarding him as a man of great good fortune; but as for France herself, the fault of submitting to personal rule was one for which it was certain that she must make recompense sooner or later. She is making it now in this terrible war; and she will continue to make it in the confusion as to Government which the war will leave when it is over. For our own sake, as well as for hers,—for France is very necessary to us,—we can only hope that the confusion may pass away with fewer evil results than generally attend nations in their passage through such a crisis.

THE FISHERMAN OF AUGE.

PROLOGUE.

A FLAT sandy shore, stretching away on the left as you look seaward till it blends with that indefinite grey tint of sea and sky that bounds all distant sea-scapes with the poetic indistinctness of the future,—ending abruptly on the right in a narrow point, which, swelling as it retreats inland, gradually rises in a lofty green hill, and effectually shuts out from sight the coast beyond. When this coast is seen,—and this is practicable at low tide, for you can then make your way over the end of the point, without so much as a wetting,—it reveals a succession of slightly curved bays, terminating in a chain of soft grey mud hills, for ever accumulating, and disappearing again by the action of the waves.

There is nothing to distinguish the first strip of coast-land from the rest, except its lonely aspect and the curious circuitous channel, almost in the shape of the figure eight,—the channel by which a small river finds its way through some lesser grey hills to the sea. This river's stony bed is always dry in summer-time, but the strangely-shaped mouth generally holds back some supply from the retreating waves; and the belief among the villagers is that, before the turn of the tide, the water so retained becomes purified from its briny flavour.

Villagers is a too populous word for the inhabitants of Auge. A dozen fishermen's cottages, at most, scattered widely apart, some on the sands, some nestling under the shelter of the mud hills, a few built on the green hill-side, and almost smothered with an overgrowth of the sea-buckthorn, yellow just now with its sticky berries.

But our chief interest is with one cottage in Auge, and that stood at the very mouth of the river, near to the little cove where all the boats lay snugly together, on the sand-dike to the left of the figure of eight, which sand-dike had yet so firm a hold over the invasions of the waves that it was almost covered with coarse grass and sea-holly; behind the cottage a fair show of lettuce, soup-herbs, and potatoes grew in the sandy soil.

A tall, handsome, young fisherman, in a blue jersey and scarlet cap, stood in front of the cottage.

He was talking vehemently, but it was easy to see that he was not angry with the quiet woman seated on one of the benches beneath the little porch.

"There, my mother, I have told thee all," and the young fisherman threw himself on the ground, and buried his head in Madame Lelièvre's lap, to hide his agitation.

His mother bent her face over him,—such a gentle face! with the small straight nose, the timid regular mouth, and large soft brown eyes one sees among the women of Caen.

Her son had been talking of love, and there seemed to be something in the word that made her sigh deeply before she spoke. "I have seen that thou hadst trouble in thy heart this long time, my child, and often I wished to ask the cause,—but then I said to myself, 'My Désiré loves his mother, and he is good; when he sees fit he will come to her to get this thorn removed.' But I cannot remove it, my son. Victorine Triquet is a good woman, and she loves me; but I cannot ask her to give thee her little Marie till thou hast a home to bring her to."

"My mother!" Désiré started up, angry and excited, but her sweet, resigned face checked an imprecation half uttered. "If my father will settle nothing, how can I make a home? He says neither 'yes' nor 'no;' he will not admit me to be partner in his gains, and when I ask to leave him and join Jacques Fayel, he makes no answer. Mother, mother! thou oughtest to help me now,—but for thee, I had quarrelled out and out long ago, and had a cabin of my own, for Jacques gains more than any of us."

The colour sprang over his mother's pale face. It was plain that some unusual emotion had mastered her patience, for she clasped her son's arm closely with both hands, and her words came hurriedly, almost with vehemence.

"No, Désiré! never quarrel with thy father—never! I shall not grow old; and when I am gone there will be room for Marie. You will both want a woman to make your soup, and wash and mend your clothes. Only I ask myself if Marie Triquet will do this, or if she will not want a richer husband than my Désiré."

"Hush, mother! you say this too often; and as for Marie, she is not rich. You know when her father died, his affairs took a long time to settle, and this has made La Veuve Triquet a much poorer woman than she expected to be. Unless Marie marries some one, she must mind the shop all her life; and I should think it is a happier lot to sit in one's own cottage mending the clothes of the man one loves, than to stand all day behind a counter selling cakes and tarts to imbeciles of children."

Madame Lelièvre was not convinced,—but what loving mother ever had the best of an argument against her only son?—and she ended by promising to sound Madame Triquet, the next time she went to

Caen, about Marie's future, and, if possible, to hint at Désiré's attachment.

Her son kissed her forehead with the mixture of tenderness and reverence he always showed her, and then strolled away over the sands in front of the cottage. They were deserted just now: all the inhabitants of the little fishing village, except a few of the old and infirm, had gone out some distance along the coast to a point where a Spanish vessel had been wrecked two days before. The young fisherman had stayed at home on purpose to open his heart to his mother. She never left Auge, except for mass on high festivals and for market days, when he always accompanied her to Caen.

He turned and looked back at her now, as she sat knitting a blue worsted stocking, in front of the one-storied cottage, and as some of her words recurred to him, he trembled to think what his home would be to him without his mother.

It was only a two-roomed cabin, with a tiled roof covered with thatch, many coloured with house-leek and other parasites nestling in its crevices; in summer-time, green with vine-leaves, which were already bursting from their brown wrappings, apparently in a hurry to greet the warm sunshine in which the far-stretching sands and glittering sea lay basking.

Céline Lelièvre sat knitting on till her son was out of sight,—sheltered from the sun's blaze by a little wooden porch he had made for her years before. But his words still troubled her. She soon let her pins droop lower and lower, and finally laying them aside, she rested her face in the palm of one hand, holding her elbow steady with the other, while she pondered the best way of dealing with her quondam friend Victorine Triquet.

Years ago they had been schoolfellows; every day had they gone to school, and come home again with their arms lovingly twined round one another's necks; every day at lesson-time had they sat on the same bench, learned the same task, and at each prize distribution also, La Veuve Triquet, or rather Victorine Coulard, had been followed by the loving eyes of her friend as she went up for her couronne and her books, while Céline felt but too thankful for her friend's triumph, and her own escape from such publicity, only coming in herself for an "honourable mention" in the shape of an "accessite." But the friendship had chilled as the characters of the two girls developed. The fair-haired, blue-eyed, thoroughly Norman-faced Victorine, with her hearty greeting and ready sympathy, was cold-hearted and worldly, and told Céline she was throwing herself away when she learned that her friend was promised to Martin Lelièvre, the fisherman of Auge.

Other people, who knew a little about Martin,—no one knew much,—thought, too, that such a charming girl as Céline was lost on the silent, cunning-looking, though handsome, fisherman. But Victorine

did not care about his temper or his principles, she only thought of his poverty and of the immense sacrifice Celine would make in giving up Caen for a village on the sea-shore. One thing was certain, she would not be so foolish,—the richest claimant would be the preferred one;—so when portly, middle-aged M. Triquet, the well-to-do pastry-cook asked her of her mother, she was quite ready to say “yes,” and to be married in a fortnight. She was a widow four years later, with one little girl;—and Marie Triquet, a pretty likeness of her mother, had been ever since he left school the adored of Désiré Lelièvre.

Although Auge was twelve miles distant from Caen, Madame Lelièvre, as has been said, always went in for fête days and for any extra marketing, and as she took Désiré with her, and generally contrived to see her old friend, the two children were frequent play-mates, and shared each other's bon-bons and secrets in true child's fashion.

But after Marie had made her First Communion,—that epoch in the life of a French girl,—Madame Triquet would embrace her dear friend tenderly in the street, and ask eagerly for the health of monsieur her husband, but she would no longer invite the mother and son in to rest, and spend the time they had to spare with her before their return to Auge. And when at fifteen the little timid Marie suddenly developed into a very pretty, plump damsel, La Veuve discouraged any intimacy between the young people.

At the grand Easter fair, where she paraded Marie in great state, also her own superb cap of point de Bruxelles,—La Veuve's mother had worn a real Caennais cap, but her daughter would have disdained anything so pagan and countrified,—when they met Désiré Lelièvre, she became stone-blind to the youth's respectful greeting; he just managed to present his fairing to Marie, but she was hurried away with her thanks unspoken.

A few chance words had been since then occasionally interchanged between the young people, and Marie had smiled so sweetly and blushed so timidly, that Désiré had felt happy again, convinced that as yet he had no rival in the field. All this he had confessed to his mother, but he ended by saying that she must not delay in asking Marie as a wife for him, or he felt sure he should lose her.

Madame Lelièvre was quiet and timid, but she was quick-witted, and seldom took long to find her way out of a difficulty. Now, the longer she thought, the more perplexed she grew.

“If it only had been Marie,” she said, and she went on thinking. Presently, with the confusion of her ideas, came a strange sharp pain in her head, which almost made her cry out in agony. She rose abruptly, and turned into the cottage.

Désiré came in at the usual hour for his mid-day meal; the last piece of wood he had thrown in the open fire-place was smouldering—all but extinguished; there had been no attempt made to re-kindle

a flame. He looked at the table ; it was just as it had been when he left the cottage ; the soup pot stood on the cold part of the hearth.

What had happened ? He hastened into the inner room ; his mother lay on her bed, pale, but not insensible, although she took no notice of his entrance ; her hands were catching at her dress, at the bed-coverings, as if for refuge from her sufferings ; and, to his horror, Désiré found that she was speechless.

He went to summon aid, but there was no one left in Auge who could be sent to Caen for a doctor, and he did not dare to leave her himself. The pain soon became an agony too terrible to witness, and he could do nothing to relieve it. After a while it seemed suddenly to cease, she lay quite still, and Désiré thought she slept ; but long before his father's return in the evening he knew that his mother would never wake again.

His visions of love and Marie seemed for ever blotted out. He loved his mother with that filial passion only found in men ; he would scarcely yield her up for the last rites to be performed, and when Jacques Fayel came to look for him, the day after the funeral, he found Désiré lying on the floor beside the bed where she had lain, in dumb, tearless despair.

Désiré roused from this state by degrees, but his father's apparent indifference stirred his discontented feelings towards him to active rebellion ; it became impossible to him to lead the quiet uneventful life of that little fishing village without her who had made home so happy.

The Italian war was just then public talk. A section of the 75th regiment of the line was quartered in Caen, and one evening Désiré presented himself before the captain, Monsieur de Gragnac, to be enrolled.

The matter was soon settled, for broad-shouldered young fellows like Désiré were welcome, and as it was war-time he took service for two years only. Perhaps a longer period would not have suited Désiré ; for though he missed his mother more and more, and shrank from the strange sneering callousness with which his father treated her loss, he had not forgotten Marie Triquet, and he still cherished hopes about her, much as he shrank from present happiness.

Four months before, on the ever memorable 1st of January, 1859, words had been spoken at the Tuileries which had made war a possible and prominent idea in the minds of all men.

The French army had been daily adding to its numbers ; the opening of the campaign was now eagerly looked for ; glory, honours, riches, were prophesied to those who swelled the ranks ; but to Désiré Lelièvre the stirring change of life and scene offered sufficient temptation as a refuge from the bitterness of his first great sorrow.

In a week's time the regiment was in Paris, and before long it was on its way to Italy.

CHAPTER I.

THE RETURN HOME.

IN less than two months Montebello, Magenta, Melegnano, Solferino, had all been fought. Europe was astounded by the news of an armistice; the Italian campaign was over; and on the 14th of August, the eve of the Fête de l'Empereur, the victorious troops re-entered Paris in triumph.

Désiré accompanied his regiment to the camp at Chalons, and thence to other quarters; but in the summer of the following year the bataillon to which he belonged was ordered to Normandy, and one bright day in July he found himself again in Caen.

He had asked for a few weeks' leave, and quitting the troops at the caserne on the outskirts of the town, he took his way through the well-known streets towards St. Pierre, the tapering spire of which greeted him already.

The streets were quieter than usual, for all the population had betaken itself to the suburb of Vaucelles to see the entry of the troops.

The cool shadow cast by the tall grey stone houses refreshed Désiré after the march along the hot, dusty high road. How delicious to the eye was the fresh verdure of the vine leaves clinging to the quaintly-sculptured dormers, or framing in an open window, its sill gay with scarlet flowers. Still more exquisite to the tired traveller were the vistas of luxuriant gardens, rich in flowering shrubs and trellised creeping plants, forming bowers of verdure, which suddenly and unexpectedly disclosed themselves through small iron gratings or low-browed stone doorways, in what might have seemed the busiest and most work-a-day part of the thoroughfare.

Every well-known object made the young soldier's heart beat, and as he approached the Place Saint-Pierre the exquisite proportions of the lofty spire rising in its midst became blurred by the mist that rose in his eyes when he remembered how often he and his mother had gazed up at it together, and had decided that it must have been sent from heaven just as it now appeared, for no human architect could have planned so wondrous a work; but Désiré had travelled since then, and had seen greater marvels than even the perfect flèche of St. Pierre.

He was roused from the past to the present. A comely well-dressed woman, with a pretty blushing girl beside her, both of them evidently returning from Vaucelles, were standing close to him, and before he could speak Madame Triquet had exclaimed—

“Ma foi, Désiré! and is it really you?”

In the excitement of the day and the sudden emotion called up by his resemblance to his dead mother, La Veuve Triquet had

forgotten all prudence, had received him with open arms, and he had embraced her affectionately on both cheeks.

Then he turned to look at the little figure that he felt rather than saw close beside her mother, and somehow it seemed necessary to take Marie's hand and kiss it. How lovely she had grown in his absence!—the rosebud had expanded!

Perhaps La Veuve was struck too with the change that time had made in Désiré; his face was closely shaven, except a pair of severe moustaches, almost matching in colour the rich bronze of his skin. He looked more thoughtful, and certainly far sterner, than La Veuve had thought possible; his eyes were brown, like his mother's, but their expression had changed; perhaps his uniform and his medals,—for he had three of the decorations the French love so dearly,—impressed her; the result was, that instead of dismissing him in her usual patronising good-humoured manner, she was still listening with breathless interest to his account of the last great battle, Solferino, when they reached the Rue Notre-Dame.

The flood of remembrance that had filled Désiré's eyes as he entered the Place St. Pierre had been dried up by the sunshine of Marie's presence. He had tried several times to get a peep at her after the first greeting; but he felt that she was there on the other side of her mother. Ah! if that walk could have continued; and surely it must do so,—it seemed to him that it could never cease. His heart was drawn out of him; it was with Marie!

He had forgotten all else. He took no notice of many friendly greetings; he did not cast one backward look at his favourite spire, framed by the carved woodwork of the projecting gables on either side, which seemed to keep up an everlasting nodding to each other, possibly of congratulation at being spared, in their half-timbered age and quaintness, amid the universal creation of new, unpicturesque stone buildings. Nor did Désiré so much as glance onward at the two landmarks of the town,—the famous spires of St. Etienne,—which filled the farther end of the street. Soldier though he was, he had still enough of sentiment to have fancied a welcome in every well-known object; but all sense was mastered by passion, and the ardent longing to discover whether it was in any degree returned.

"And for how long are you settled here, my friend?" said La Veuve, as they neared the shop windows, full of tempting pastry, above which "La Veuve Triquet," in large golden raised letters, told that she had reached her home.

"For three or four months, and I have a leave of some weeks. But, Madame Triquet, now that war is over, I am tempted to leave the army, and settle here for good. I don't like an idle life; and to be a soldier in garrison,—*ma foi!* it is as dull as ditch-water."

"Well, well, well; you will talk to your father." La Veuve's volubility increased, for she suddenly remarked the direction Désiré's

eyes had taken,—as they now stood still the young people were face to face,—and a side glance showed her Marie's crimson blushes. "And, my friend, I say to you à tantôt; I am forgetting your father's anxiety in my selfish pleasure at seeing you. Hasten to him at once. There! I will not listen while you say another word." She pushed Marie into the shop, and then stood in the doorway herself, and, although she wore no crinoline, almost filled the space as she planted a hand on each broad hip. "Run to Auge, like a good boy, and don't keep your father waiting. Remember, you are all he has left, ce pauvre homme."

The words touched Désiré. Marie's image was succeeded rapidly by the last conscious look on his dying mother's face,—a look that had haunted him often. Now, on the sudden impulse, he turned away, after a hastily-taken farewell, and full of the strong resolve of youth, wearied of the distance that still lay between him and his last remaining parent.

Ah, children! ah, friends! how perfect are all our future "castles!" How ruined and incomplete those we have tried to build! Will no warnings teach us? Will nothing but repeated failure satisfy us that it is only in romances that sudden conversions are effected, that dispositions, which have been hardening against each other for years like blocks of granite, will not in a day mingle like the sands of the sea? Only our own experience can teach us the bitter truth, that impulse and will are not all that we require; there must be patience and perseverance to aid the work. As the silkworm has surrounded itself, by little and little, with its warm nest, so must we unwind the golden thread of habit patiently and slowly, if we would not lose the clue to its entire unravelment. But Désiré was young, ardent, and ignorant; he only thought that he would and could be for the future such a model son as the world had never seen, and that his father would love him dearly.

Martin embraced him on his first arrival, and then pushed him back and looked in his face. He clasped his hands over his eyes and turned away, shuddering. Désiré guessed that the likeness which he knew still existed between himself and his mother was the cause of this, and he tried to soothe his father by affectionate words, and an assurance that now he had come home he hoped to make him less desolate. But Martin started up, looked wildly about him, as if seeking for some one, and then, bursting into a hard sneering laugh, left the cottage.

There had never been thorough confidence between Désiré and his father. His mother's frequent secret unhappiness, and the cold indifference with which her husband treated her, had roused a determined spirit of opposition in the boy, sometimes shown in open acts of rebellion. Martin had rarely tyrannised over him. Now he seemed quite changed. When they met again in the evening, he

looked at his son with distrust, and was evidently greatly disturbed when the young soldier announced the length of his leave.

Désiré thought he was much aged; his lithe active figure was bent, the wrinkles on his face had deepened, and he was thin to emaciation. His son remembered that he had often been accused of miserly ways by his fellow-fishermen, and he began to see that his solitary life had increased these, and that he probably shrank from the burden of an inmate for so long a period.

But next day brought no softening in his father's manner,—rather increased hardness in the sneering comments he pronounced on all Désiré related; and the young man began to feel that Martin had taken his wife's death more to heart than any one had supposed possible, and that the loss of her influence had made his own filial task a hard one.

On the third day his father remained at home, and Désiré seized the opportunity of speaking openly to him of Marie, and of his hopes and wishes. Martin listened in profound silence, and then he shook his head. "And I tell thee no, my boy. Thou art like the little birds which peep over the edge of the nest, and then think they have seen the world. If thou beginnest life with a bag of debts tied round thy neck, it will grow weightier and weightier, till either it will strangle and make an end of thee, or thou mayst be tempted to fling it and thy conscience away together."

"When my father is the creditor? *foi de ma vie!* Dost thou then think that military honour is all we soldiers learn to care for?"

Désiré knit his bushy eyebrows together, but the look he gave his father was more sorrowful than angry.

"Honour!" Martin Lelièvre's smile had a mocking quality in it, which made his smooth, brown, wrinkled face, with its lipless mouth and small, grey, watery eyes realise one's ideal of "Redcapsly." "Honour is very well, my son, under a glass case. The rich never take the case off. As to us poor, dame! hunger and thirst and every want of nature crush the glass early for us; but debt, *mon ami*, it must be strong glass indeed which resists that pressure!"

Désiré turned away. He longed, too, to preserve peace in his home,—the home he had not seen for more than a year, and which had seemed to him on his first arrival a paradise, full of fresh memories of childhood,—of his mother, whose death had driven him from it. He came out of the cottage. There was no use in self-deceit. His father was in earnest; his marriage with Marie was hopeless for the present; and, what pressed heavier still, the truth he had so long suspected without knowing what he feared had been uttered. His father had no belief in honour or honesty,—not even in his. The terrible doubt that followed stupefied him,—was Martin himself honest? But he thrust it away. He might find himself unable to continue to love his father, but he would try to

respect him. But now he must act. He had asked Martin to admit him as partner in his fishery, to demand Marie Triquet in marriage, and to lend him the sum of three hundred and seventy-five francs necessary to pay his discharge for the remaining nine months of his military service; and the old man, as we have seen, had refused decidedly to be a party to any scheme which would begin his son's new life with debt, although he had confessed to Désiré that his inheritance would some day be larger than he expected.

There was energy beneath young Lelièvre's ardour,—energy that not only raised his drooping hopes, but kept them sustained. In some ways it was a relief not to be associated with his father. Two days had taught him the difference between intentions and actions,—nothing less than a miracle could make life easy when passed with such a man as Martin Lelièvre; surely his wife's death must have changed him strangely. It seemed to Désiré, as he walked slowly up and down on the sands, that, although his father had been always hard, and sneering, and impracticable, he had never spoken the reckless words or avowed the lawless opinions that escaped him now unchecked.

The fishermen came in with their nets, the girls and women with their spades and knives, and full baskets. Désiré seemed to be searching the sands for some undiscoverable object, so slowly did he walk along, his head bent down, his hands clasped behind him, while his eyes never left the ground.

Suddenly he stood still, and then hastily retraced his steps to the cottage.

Martin was stooping over the open fire-place, stirring his soup-pot. His supple figure looked still slighter in his fisherman's garb of dark blue, the knitted jersey fitted him closely, and the sleeves, rolled back to the elbow, showed the knotted intricacies of his muscular arms; the firelight gleamed on his dark face, with its regular features, compressed mouth, and smoothly-wrinkled skin; his scarlet night-cap was pulled down nearly to his restless grey eyes, which seemed to be always seeking something never found.

He started quickly as his son's step sounded on the cottage floor.

"Eh bien! Where art thou going now?"

Martin spoke in a surprised tone, for Désiré went straight to the armoire,—which, with three chairs, a bench, and a round table, made all the furniture,—took out his uniform, and began rapidly to exchange his working clothes for it.

"I am going to Caen, my father."

"To Caen! And for what? Thou art not such a fool, Désiré, as to thrust thy head into the jaws of that she-wolf, La Triquet, that she may crunch thee at her pleasure. No; thou art my son! Thou couldst not be such a dunce as to make thy own proposal. But listen." He raised both hands, and then with a quick gesture

extended them towards his son. "I am not so indifferent as thou mayst think, Désiré mio, aha! hai capito. I have not been in thine Italy, yet thou seest I know something. There is no room here for another fisherman. I tell thee besides, Marie Triquet is too friande for a fish-wife, and besides, I like to be alone. Find employment somewhere else. Then we will see. We promise nothing, however; absolutely nothing."

An eager hope sprang into his son's eyes at the beginning of his speech; but, at the closing words, it faded away into the same dull sad expression that had filled them while he paced up and down the sands.

He just nodded, muttered "*à tantôt*," and then, stepping over the threshold, as soon as he had settled his cap firmly on his head he strode rapidly towards Caen.

At the great Calvary nearest the city he saw a young girl kneeling, but he scarcely noticed her as he hurried on.

The girl was rising from her knees as he passed; she stood looking after him.

She was not pretty, rather above middle height, and slenderly made. It was easy to see by her costume that she belonged to a fishing village, though she wore one of the invariable close-fitting caps with cockscomb frill of lace a-top that characterise the women of Caen nowadays.

She was not pretty. She had nothing in the way of complexion or features to attract notice; but there was a stamp of candour and intelligence on her face, and a soft light in her dark grey eyes as she looked after Désiré Lelièvre.

She turned again to the Calvary, and offered up a prayer for her old playmate, and then came down the steps and set out briskly on the way to Auge. This was Mimi or Emilie Fayel, the sister of Désiré's friend Jacques. Though Désiré had been the hero of his own village, he had had in his boyhood no eyes or words for any girl except Marie Triquet.

CHAPTER II.

THE COUNSEL OF CAPTAIN DE GRAGNAC.

MONSIEUR DE GRAGNAC, the captain of Désiré's company, was sitting smoking in his lodging when there came a rapping at the door.

He said "*Entrez*" not quite as cheerfully as usual, for on the table before him lay an uncut yellow volume, just sent by the author, and he was longing to read it with the mixture of interest, curiosity, and unbelief with which we generally peruse the books of our dear friends and relatives; but his cheerful look came back when he saw who

his visitor was. He nodded a smiling "bon jour" to Désiré Lelièvre's military salute.

"Well, Lelièvre, what is it? I thought you had got a month's leave."

"Yes, yes, monsieur," Désiré said these words quickly enough, but there he stopped.

"You have got into some scrape then, and you think that I can help you. Very well, mon ami, tell me at once what it is."

"Pardon, Monsieur le Capitaine, it is a scrape, and it is not. Ma foi! it is,—that,—that I want to get my discharge."

"Comment! your discharge!" the Captain sat bolt upright; he had till now leaned back in his chair, smoking his cigar as leisurely as before Désiré entered. "Why you have scarcely seen more than a year's service!"

"It is true, Monsieur le Capitaine; but the war is over, and I cannot lead an idle life, and,—and,—I have another reason besides."

And then, little by little, the Captain drew from Désiré the story of his love for Marie, which he told, too, like a man, without any sheepish false shame. He said that since he had seen Marie again he felt quite sure that his head would always be filled with her, and that he should never do any good at anything till he was married. And when this was all said, Désiré drew a long breath, like one who has laid down a burden, and feels all the better for it.

The Captain leaned back in his chair. He had taken the cigar from his lips, and held it between the fingers of one hand while he twisted and retwisted his moustaches with the other. Captain de Gragnac was a brave and distinguished soldier, and he was not particularly selfish, but to him evidently the infatuation of such a love as Désiré's was an enigma.

"What a horrible waste of life," he thought, "for this fine handsome young fellow, with a world full of women before him, at one-and-twenty to give up all freedom and tie himself to a pretty-faced doll,—for what else can she be at seventeen?—and a life of hard labour to support perhaps a large family!"

"Well," he said at last; for Désiré moved restlessly, as if impatient for his answer. "I've no doubt you think you are right, mon brave, but there seem to me two or three points still to be considered. You say you feel sure, if you can find yourself an employment, your father will find the three hundred and seventy-five francs to pay off your coming time of service. Bon! But, now, first, employment which will keep a wife and children is not found directly one looks for it, as you find crabs in the rocks, Lelièvre, and next, is your father also willing to furnish the necessary funds for your mobilier?—for your savings out of a year's service can't be much,—we all know how little profit there was in our Italian cam-

paign. And, also, I think there are more idle employments than that of a soldier in garrison."

Lelièvre smiled. He felt secretly disappointed; he had always looked on his captain as all-powerful, knowing him to be,—what is rare among French officers of the line,—both well-born and influential, and it is wonderful, considering all things, how deeply the reverence for gentle blood is rooted in the hearts of French provincials.

"I am not afraid for the mobilier, monsieur; besides, it does not cost much,—a bed, an armoire, a table, some chairs, some articles for cooking, and that is all. I have some of these things which belonged to my mother before she married; they are mine now," he looked very sad as he said this, "and for the rest, I think Madame Triquet would help if my father would not."

"Bon!" The Captain was still contemplating Désiré as if he were an animal of a new species. Marriage was to Monsieur de Gragnac an institution,—nothing more, an admirable institution at forty-five or fifty years of age. When life begins to be as fatiguing as heretofore it has been charming, it is well to take a wife, or rather to allow one's mother or aunt to take a wife for one, to look after one's income and one's ménage, an agreeable, douce compagne, who will make the evening of one's days pass pleasantly; but to mix up love and its hopes and fears and passionate joys and griefs with such an institution was, Captain de Gragnac had hitherto thought, only a state of mind to be met with in novels; so unreal, so improbable, such a falsehood against the existing state of things as perfectly to justify mothers in keeping such pernicious amusements as novels from the reading of their young daughters. He thought over all his acquaintances. Never once had he heard of such a folly as a marriage, the origin of which had been mutual affection. And how could it be? If he married he should get his mother to ask some young lady of her parents, he should have a peep at her first at the opera, or if that were not practicable, he should content himself with her photograph, then he should be presented to her as her future husband, and he should see her at most three or four times in her mother's presence; she would call him monsieur and he would call her mademoiselle till they married.

He took his cigar out of his mouth again when he came to the end of these reflections, and looked up at Désiré. It might be that this sort of thing was usual among the people. Certainly, he had never had a confidence of the heart from one of his soldiers before. Love, as a stepping-stone to marriage, might,—who could say?—be as common among badly-born people as the custom of wearing blouses among the peasantry. But then again it might only be an infatuation of this young soldier's. Clearly it was his duty to caution him.

"Is this the first love affair you've had, Lelièvre?"

Désiré reddened. There was something very practical and unsympathising in the way the Captain said "love affair."

"Ma foi! monsieur,"—he shrugged his shoulders,—“I don't mean to say Marie's the only girl I ever fancied; but she's the only one I ever wished to make my wife.”

“And is it, do you think, wise,—when you confess that your head is so full of her as to interfere with your duties,—to make her your wife?”

“Comment, Monsieur le Capitaine!” Désiré looked flushed and astonished.

“Understand me, mon ami, these fierce flames confuse the brain with their smoke while they last, and die out quickly. Take my word for it, Lelièvre, when you have been married to your wife two months you may feel friendship for her, but no longer love. Now, a great many more qualities are wanting to fulfil the requirements of a sentiment than of a passion.” The Captain smiled here, and raised his eyebrows at himself, for talk so far above the comprehension of his hearer. “What I mean is,” he said, quickly, “are you not too much in love now to judge whether Marie is likely to suit you as a wife?”

And now again Captain de Gragnac smiled at himself. According to this doctrine an intimate acquaintance with your future wife before marriage was necessary for your happiness. No, it could not be for well-bred folks, or it would be “de règle;” but for “the people,” who must necessarily live afterwards in much closer companionship, it doubtless was so.

“But, monsieur, it is the love I have so long felt for her, and which the sight of her has,—has,—has,—well, monsieur, I can't tell you how I love her now. That makes me sure she is the girl I ought to marry.”

The Captain felt there was no use in prolonging the argument. He and Désiré were only talking in an unknown tongue each to the other.

“Have you thought of any employment?” he said.

“Well, monsieur, that is what I came to you for. I should like out-door work best, if I could get it; but, you know, the farmers give such small pay hereabouts that it's only the women that will take it.”

“If you had served longer you might have had a chance of being named garde-champêtre; but, you see, my friend, that is only given to old soldiers. It is their perquisites, in fact. Really, I don't know how to help you.”

And again he put his cigar in his mouth, and puffed away vigorously.

“If I could get a post as gardener,” said Désiré, “to some gentleman, monsieur's recommendation would help me greatly.”

"But what do you know about gardening? Gardening is a business which must be learned."

"Ma foi! monsieur. I am determined to earn a living, and I would soon learn what was necessary."

"Well, then, be patient for two days," said Monsieur de Gragnac. "I am going to Le Callac, and I may possibly hear of something to suit you; and, meantime, you can think of all I have said to you."

Désiré poured forth his thanks with the effusion only a Frenchman is capable of, the tears glistening in his eyes while he did so, and then he made his military salute and departed.

Young as he was, he had a remarkable power of influencing those to whom he spoke. His handsome, intelligent face may have had something to do with this, but his manner was so simple and truthful, so entirely free from self-conceit, while it conveyed the impression of earnest self-dependence, that hitherto, although he might not have so many acquaintances as some of his comrades, he had never lost a friend.

Monsieur de Gragnac felt a warm interest in his fortunes, although he still thought Désiré was throwing himself away. By good chance the lord of the domain at Le Callac was in want of a garde. He said he would prefer a soldier,—so great a moralatrice is the French army now esteemed,—and he would take any soldier out of Captain de Gragnac's company without other recommendation but that of having served under him. As the country round was wild and uninhabited he should prefer an active young man to an older one.

Captain de Gragnac sent for his protégé as soon as he returned to Caen, and Désiré seemed scarcely able to believe in his good fortune. He stood still looking at the Captain, unable to bring out a word of thanks.

"The worst of it is," said Monsieur de Gragnac, smiling, for he quite understood the young man's emotion, "that I fear this will serve to increase your marriage madness. The pay of a private garde is, as you probably know, just double that of a public one."

CHAPTER III.

DÉSIRÉ'S COURTSHIP.

To Désiré's great surprise, when he told his father of his good fortune Martin Lelièvre looked pleased, and said, cheerfully, that he supposed the next move would be to ask the pretty Marie of Madame Triquet.

His son had expected opposition, sulkiness, a final coming round, perhaps, after much perseverance on his own part. This sudden yielding filled him with joy.

He embraced his father heartily, but Martin repulsed him; told him to keep his demonstrations for Marie, and then deliberately

dressed himself in all his best clothes, and started off to await at the cross road the diligence which conveyed travellers to Caen.

He peremptorily refused to let Désiré go with him.

"Old heads waggle together best alone," he said; "young ones are always de trop when there is business to be done; besides,—who knows,—*La Mère Triquet* may have promised her daughter elsewhere, and may tell me I'm seeking feathers from a plucked chicken."

He said the last words, not as if he believed in such a possibility, but because he could not resist the opportunity of sneering at his son's hopes; and once again Désiré stood still, bewildered at the change that had come over his father.

Had grief for his wife's death struck so deep as to change his sulky, sullen nature to the reckless, wild mocking fits that at times possessed him now, or was his mind giving way? Only this last surmise could account for the terrified glances he at times darted round the rooms, and the ghastly paleness that followed.

The day seemed long to Désiré. He knew his father could not return before evening. He wandered up and down the sands till the tide drove him away, and then he climbed to the heights beyond them, with a vague hope,—although he knew it was far too soon,—of seeing a cart in the distance, for his father had said he should trust to some chance mode of coming home.

Désiré tried to recollect every look and word of Marie's since his return,—he had managed to see her several times after his first interview with Captain de Gragnac; and each time,—so it seemed to him,—she had been more willing to listen while he spoke, and had looked up in his face more and more sweetly when he wished her and her mother good-bye.

It must,—it should come right! and yet, although he could not find the slightest shadow of foundation for it, a film of doubt and mistrust came between his mental sight and the bright future pictures his fancy drew.

At last the long day came to an end,—the grey and orange tints of the cliffs changed to burnished gold as the setting sunlight flashed over them; and as Désiré looked once more towards the high road, winding its up-and-down course into the interior, he saw something moving on it.

The soft, moss-like earth yielded as he sprang again into the path below, and hurried towards the road.

It was the fisherman.

"Well, well!" he said mockingly, "I have not had my journey for nothing."

Désiré poured out his thanks, he could scarcely believe in his happiness; but he did not this time attempt to embrace his father. "Eh bien—what has happened? Tell me everything, my father."

"Bah! thou art like a woman, Désiré,—they must always have words, men should be content with facts. What wilt thou? La Veuve is willing to take thee for a son-in-law as soon as thou hast got thy discharge."

Désiré's eyes spoke the eager question that came.

"Tais-toi!"—Martin put up his hand to check the young man's words,—“the money will be paid at once; and if thou art bent on running thy head into a halter,—a halter, mind, that can never be unfastened,—why thou mayest see Marie to-morrow, after thou hast arranged the matter with thy Captain. He will tell thee how to manage the affair; for me, I have done enough.”

His look and manners were bitterly unkind, and he turned away with unfriendly haste as if to check the expression of his son's gratitude. It seemed to Désiré that the fisherman was acting a part to conceal his real feelings. The next minute the young man blamed himself for such a suspicion; something had happened in Caen to annoy his father, or,—who could tell?—the prospect of his son's marriage might have recalled his own, and its sad ending; and such a rugged, determined nature as Martin Lelièvre's was not a likely one to betray his sorrow even to his only child.

But Désiré was too happy to think much about anybody besides Marie. Happy is scarcely the word; it was a fevered rapture, under which he took no heed of time or anything that passed around him.

It was even more unreal, more dream-like, next day, in La Veuve's back-parlour, as he sate close beside Marie, holding one of her dear little soft hands in his, and looking into her face. It is true her mother sat opposite,—had sat opposite even when he had pressed his first kiss on Marie's blushing forehead. Her presence was neither necessary nor satisfactory; but then these were early days, and the young girl's extreme timidity had made Désiré, ardent lover as he was, feel bashful in taking that first kiss.

It was very delicious to sit there looking at the pretty modest girl whose blue eyes had not once fully met his, and feeling that she would soon be all his own. Only he wished a customer would come into the shop. He did not want to listen to La Veuve's incessant talk; he wanted to say many little words to Marie, which would be most uninteresting to her sharp-eared mother; also he wanted to see how those blue eyes looked with the lashes lifted, and whether he could not make the rosy lips dimple into a smile. Above all, he wanted to hear Marie say she loved him, and there was no hearing anything with Madame Triquet in presence.

There came a quick tread of little feet in the shop; his heart throbbed with pleasant anticipations. La Veuve must surely attend to her customers! But Désiré's hopes were not to be fulfilled so speedily.

"Make haste, *mon chou* ! thou must never let anything domestic interfere with business, must she, *mon garçon* ?" She looked at Désiré as if she were sure of his approval, and quite unconscious of the rueful gaze with which his eyes followed Marie into the shop. She talked glibly for a few minutes, and then getting no answer, she looked up with a sharp twinkle in her eyes.

"You are hurried, my friend ; and it is a pity, too, for a fine youth to waste his day in chattering to an old woman over her tricot. Yes, yes ; I know you are polite, but I cannot suffer it. This is Marie's business time. She may be obliged to remain in the shop for an hour,—what do I know ? for two,—for three hours !"

"But I am in no hurry," persisted Désiré.

"Ah ! you are so kind ; but this which I tell you is better, is it not ? You will come next Sunday, and you will accompany the little Marie to St. Pierre for *Le Salut* ; and after you can take her, if you will, for a promenade in the *Cours Caffarelli*. *Mon Dieu* ! I tell you that it is delicious there in the cool of the evening."

Here was a charming prospect ; with the certainty of having Marie to himself for several hours he grew reconciled to the present parting, and he bade adieu to Madame Triquet more easily than she expected.

"*Au revoir, mon ami* ! My remembrance to your good father." She held out her dimpled hand to him ; then, as if prompted by an after-thought, she called after him,—

"Don't stop tattling in the shop ; you know that it might compromise Marie."

She winked and smiled good-humouredly, but Désiré passed on without answering.

He found the shop empty.

Marie was sitting behind one of the counters, bending over her embroidery frame.

Désiré bent over it too ; but before he could whisper a word, a warning tap sounded on the glass-door of the parlour, and made them both start.

Désiré reddened. This sort of espionage was hateful. However, he thought of Sunday, and decided that it was, on the whole, wiser not to provoke Madame Triquet by resistance, on the first day of his courtship.

When he reached the pastry-cook's next Sunday he was grievously disappointed to find that *La Veuve* not only meant to accompany her daughter, but that she proposed to walk between him and Marie.

"It is charming, you know, to feel that one has a child on each arm," she said to Désiré.

He found the service, short as it was, very wearisome. It is over at last ; the *Benediction* is said ; the chairs squeak and scrape over the floor as every one hastens outside into the cooler air. He is beside

Marie again as she mounts the steps and dips her fingers into the holy water stoup.

They pass out of church through the great sculptured western doorway, and an acquaintance fastens herself on Madame Triquet. This is Désiré's opportunity, and he offers his arm to Marie; but she shakes her head, and glances at her mother. She looks at Désiré, however; but there is no response in her eyes to the love which fills his own.

"Marie," he whispers, tenderly, "do you remember fair-time, before I went away?"

Marie smiles sweetly, and says "yes" in a pleasant voice; and yet Désiré is not satisfied; he expected a blush and drooping eyelids for answer, and somehow he would have preferred this reply to any word at all; for that fairing had been his first effort at making Marie understand his devotion,—a pink heart-shaped *sucre de pomme*, transfixed by a thick golden arrow, with a fan inside. Madame Triquet's acquaintance walks on with her, and Marie and Désiré are side by side.

Madame le Petit is full of news. Her husband has been to Paris to learn the fashions, and she has marvels to describe in the way of coiffure and costume. And, besides, Monsieur le Petit has brought back some choice canards and tit-bits of scandal,—fresh and astounding to the female Norman mind,—the bourgeoisie of Caen not being addicted to the reading of newspapers, and being, moreover, inhabitants of one of the purest and simplest cities of France.

Madame Triquet is desperately anxious to listen to these stories, and yet more desirous that they shall not reach Marie's ears, and little by little, she turns away from her daughter and Désiré, till her head almost touches that of Madame le Petit.

It is dusk when they reach the Cours Caffarelli, almost gloomily dark on beyond, where the lights from the town and the quays can no longer penetrate the shadow beneath the solemn lines of poplar trees that border the Orne.

There are birds singing still among the trees on the other side of the river, and when the young people turn homewards again the scene before them has an almost unreal beauty as the lights reflect themselves in the dark silent water, and glow like a file of glow-worms along the basin of the harbour.

Désiré talks softly to Marie, she questions him about Italy; and, though he would rather have spoken of his love, he answers all she asks, and grows animated out of the soft languor that had tied his tongue while they walked under the trees in the Cours.

They have reached the Place Royale, and still Madame le Petit's tongue wags and Madame Triquet listens.

The Place is crowded with townspeople promenading up and down.

There are only a few gas lamps there, and it is just that sort of

confused, indistinct crowd one likes to find oneself in with one's beloved. One feels sure that every look and word is only marked by her.

Désiré did not again ask Marie to take his arm. He took her hand and drew it gently to his heart, prisoning it so tightly that she could not withdraw it.

Did Marie feel the fierce bounds with which its presence was greeted? If she did, she was not displeased thereat; for she only smiled sweetly up at Désiré the next time he spoke.

That tête-à-tête was like an intoxicating dream. Both he and Marie started and flushed as Madame, having said "*bon soir*" to her gossip, suddenly bethinks herself of her daughter, and turns her head.

"*Ma foi, Marie, thou shouldst not quit my arm! and you, Désiré, will give me yours.*"

It is all over, and when will it come again?

It is very dark as they turn out of the Place into the narrower streets where the lamps are scarcer. There is a diligence ready to start as they pass; but Désiré chooses to walk to Auge.

"It will only take me three hours," he says, as they part at Madame Triquet's door; and then he whispers to Marie that he shall think of her all the way. He can say no more; for La Veuve declares that they are very late.

(To be continued.)

HOUSE-HUNTING.

THE fact is too well known for repetition,
That man is never pleased with his condition,
And yet it is a truth that, even though old,
Consoles poor fallen mortals when retold.
However home into the heart it strike,
E'en be content—all mankind are alike.
However out of place your lines may be,
What matter if, when changed, no change you see ?
So each takes to his own again, right glad
To think his neighbour's troubles are as bad ;
Or that his lot unto another's mind
May seem as good as he need wish to find.

Now if the text thus given need extension,
Take for the sermon Brown, his wife and mansion.
Their present house seem'd all that man and wife
Could want to make a comfortable life—
That is so far as earthly mansion can
Comfort the heart of any wife or man :
But yet they growl'd in accents shrill and gruff ;
They both were tired of it—and that's enough.
And so to Robins, the great auctioneer,
Brown gave instructions, definite and clear,
To advertise it to be let or sold,
Its tenements, messuages, field and fold.
But lest a curious public should effect
Too easily admission to inspect,
Locality and name of the domain
Should be withheld—inquirers to obtain
These at the office of the auctioneer,
Also the terms of sale, or rent per year.

To find a new house Mr. and Mrs. Brown
Had been all round the outskirts of the town.
In order to economise the day,
They went exploring in a separate way,
And home at eve, each eager to express
The day's exploits, both radiant with success ;
And as they chatted o'er their tea and toast,
'Twas hard to say which had succeeded most.

" Believe me, Brown, it is the finest thing
We've seen, almost a palace for a king ;
So closely wooded and so snug withal,
The rooms so large, yes, and the rent so small ;
A mansion built when building was more rare ;
With labour cheap and plenty ground to spare ;
Grandly palatial in its gates and walls,
Broad flights of steps and spacious entrance halls,
Elizabethan windows, gables, towers,
An ample garden, stock'd with fruits and flowers,

And, bless your heart, a rookery of rooks,
Wherein the library or study looks,
Throstles, and blackbirds in perpetual song,
A sort of paradise the whole day long."

Here Brown broke in, "Restrain yourself, my dear,
Nor be so jubilant until you hear
The sort of house that I have seen to-day,
And then you'll change your note, I'm bound to say.
Not one of those mediæval haunted halls,
Where every footstep echoes and appals,
But one of modern build, with all the best
Improvements of the age—among the rest,
High ceilings, ventilation, faultless drains,
Great windows, each of two strong plate-glass panes
(And light, by modern science, has been shown
A requisite of health—a thing not known
In former times); then water, cold and hot,
Through all the house, with bath-rooms, and what not?
All heretofore unused too, I presume;
And, by the way, there's gas in every room.
But what about the garden, do you say?
The ground's too precious to be thrown away,
And so there's none—'twill be a care the less;
Each luxury is but one more distress.
Where is the house? That's where the attraction lies;
The situation is the thing we'll prize,
It overlooks the Alexandra drive—
The newest line of fashion, and alive
With all the pomp and beauty of the town."

"Humph—beauty!" cried the lady, with a frown:
"I will not have the house; no, dearest Brown,
Just think of *my* house as with yours compared;
Indeed, comparisons may well be spared;
They are as different as night and day."

"The very words," cried Brown, "I was to say—
As different in fact as day and night,
But of the two, mine's the more fair and bright,
And consequently stands for day, you know."

"Comparisons are odious, Brown, and so,
To save disputes you may as well resign
All thoughts about your house. Just look to mine—
The sweet seclusion, the abundant room,
The grand antiquity, the wooded gloom,
The rookery, the garden and the birds,
With all the etceteras such a place affords!
My dearest Brown, I wonder that you don't
Jump after such a house!"

Cried Brown, "I won't;
Your dim secluded dens have ever been
The nurseries of ennui and the spleen;
Your gardens are rheumatic, trees are damp,
And to a person of a studious stamp
Your birds were an intrusion; as for rooks,
Their din would drive the devil from his books!
I must have life and quietude combined—

Something to cheer as well as soothe the mind ;
 And this is in the mansion of my choice—
 Light, airy, free from all gross rural noise—
 Seclusion broken only by the rush
 Of cheerful carriages and glints of plush."

"Hum—plush!" sneer'd Mrs. Brown, and toss'd her head ;
 "We seem to differ in our tastes," she said ;
 "And so I think we'd better go to bed."

They went, and it may fairly be presumed
 They took their houses with them, and resumed
 The subject, each in solitary guise—
 A mood wherein we all are wondrous wise.

Next morning over breakfast they at first
 Were silent, though 'twas clear both were athirst
 To speak their minds—it might be said they burn'd,
 And therefore to the subject they return'd.

Said Mrs. Brown, "My dear, you could not guess
 What I've been thinking—for I will confess
 I am myself surprised to find it so—
 The house you've been so pleased with, do you know,
 On second thoughts, I rather like it too."

"But I've had second thoughts as well as you,"
 Cried Brown ; "and if the truth must be confess'd,
 I like your Elizabethan house the best.
 There's that about these fine old halls that blends
 Divinely with our thoughts, and even lends
 The mind a touch of the dramatic age,
 When England's best possession was the stage.
 I even think the cawing of the rooks
 Would help to deeper meaning in my books.
 And then the high-wall'd garden with its walks
 Of ancient-smelling boxwood and sweet stalks
 Of hoary lavender—there's much in this."

"No, no, as for the house, it's not amiss ;
 But this is merely sentimental stuff,
 Of which, between us two, we've had enough.
 Last evening I was wrong and you were right ;
 I've turn'd the matter over in the light
 Of common sense, which says, with ready tongue,
 This morning I am right and you are wrong.
 Thus being equal, dearest Brown, agree
 To leave the taking of the house to me."

"Peace, peace," replied her lord ; "pray who made you
 The judge of right and wrong, of false and true,
 And taught you such glib verdicts to dispense
 'Tween sentimental stuff and common sense ?
 And now you would consign me to the shelf,
 And have the taking of the house yourself !
 With all my heart, if you will leave alone
 What you miscall my house, and take your own."

"No, never, Brown, dear Brown, will I consent
 To have my fix'd determination bent.
 I've thought the houses over one by one,
 And this is the conclusion—Yours or none !"

Now what could Brown, or any other man,

Do after this ? He took the quiet plan ;
And since the grey mare was the better horse,
Fell to the morning papers, mute, of course.

But long he had not rustled them and read,
When, turning to his spouse, he blandly said,
" My love there's plenty houses to be had—
Houses of all sorts, good as well as bad.
Now here's a house embracing, I opine,
The best attractions of both yours and mine.
'Strong-built substantial mansion,' and so forth,
'A southerly exposure ; on the north
Well shelter'd by a thickly wooded range
Of hills. About an hour's walk from the Exchange.
Extensive suites of rooms '—and all the rest.
'The situation is pronounced the best
Within ten miles of town. Romantic view.
Fine vista, with the river peeping through.
An opportunity not to be lost.'

A likely place," continued he, and toss'd
The paper to his wife, and bade her read.
" It is," said she, " a likely place indeed :
Yes, lawn in front, and garden in the rear.
Apply to Robins, our own auctioneer !
We should not lose a moment ; go at once :
I look upon it as a lucky chance—
A providential, accidental miss—

We did not fix before we look'd at this."
" Well then," said Brown, " in order to agree
About this house, I hold it safe that we
Go after it together."

So they went,
And found the busy Robins all intent
Framing advertisements. First they desired
To know if any one had yet inquired
After their *own* house, but seem'd not to look
For any ready answer ; for Brown took
The paper from his pocket, and said, " Here's
A house that from the advertisement appears
The very thing for us. Is it yet sold ?
What is the price ? and is it new or old ?
Where situate ? Is its present owner dead ?
Or wherefore——"

Robins laugh'd and wagg'd his head ;
" Excuse me—dead ! no, no,—he and his wife,
I'm glad to see, are in exuberant life.
But, sure, a plain description might have shown
The house that took your fancy was your own !"

Brown stared at Robins, Robins at them both,
And they look'd puzzled, half perplex'd, and loath
To own they could have made the strange mistake ;
But, seeming from their muddle to awake,
Rejoiced so fair a mansion was unsold ;
Nor would they sell it for its weight in gold.

L.

CYNICISM.

WHAT is a cynic? What kind of character is that which naturally tends to run down into cynical moulds? Where there is no congenital tendency to cynicism, what are its most usual incidental causes? Cynicism, as a philosophy, may be left out of our reckoning. We can get nothing worth having out of Diogenes; the rationale of life asserted, or supposed to be asserted, by his school; or out of the etymology of the word. When the word cynicism is pronounced nowadays, almost every one thinks of a certain way of looking at things, which may be described as a chronic disease of moral debility. If any figure, real or imaginary, is more apt than another to start into form and colour upon the canvas of our thoughts when the word is mentioned, perhaps it is Mephistopheles. But, once started, the mind runs through an immense gallery of portraits of men to whom the adjective cynical is more or less applicable. I say men with emphasis, because cynicism is not a woman's disease; a point which will arise again directly. Timon of Athens, Rochefoucauld, Fontenelle, Swift, Napoleon, Thackeray, Byron, Talleyrand, Father Prout, Gibbon, Praed, Heine, Horace, Disraeli, David Hume,—in some of these we find the cynical colour ingrained; in some, only a streak of it; but in all it is recognisable. Taking Timon as he stands in Shakspeare, we have cynicism as a fierce, raging fever,—the debility is to come afterwards. In the ordinary cynic of modern literature or society there is neither Timon's excuse nor Timon's strength. When he is thoroughly good-humoured, and keeps to trifles, like Fontenelle for example, he is not disagreeable. Nobody can help being amused at the pleasant intellectual feints of the interlocutors in the "*Dialogues des Morts*," and nobody was ever harmed by them, because they have no more weight in them than a common charade. The mutual banter of Plato and Mary Queen of Scots settles nothing, and the verdicts of Pluto, given by way of appendix, settle things on the right side, so far as they settle things at all. David Hume is a name which some people may be surprised to see in my category; but there is plenty of cynicism in the *History of England*, and the *Essays*; nor could a sceptic,—I use the word in its true scientific, not its goody-goody, or "tract" sense,—however well-conditioned, escape the disease. Unless my memory fails me, Adam Smith says that Hume came as near to being a completely good man as any one he ever knew; but that proves nothing, and, beyond cheerfulness and fortitude, Hume's good qualities appear to have been very tepid, and just merely those that keep a man straight. The good-humour was wholly, and the fortitude

partly, constitutional; and the latter,—both in some degree,—was of the kind that comes natural to a well-knit well-to-do man, whose imagination is too poor to give him a wide horizon. It is a curious example of the ineptitude of some people's moral criticism that they will boldly deny that Thackeray was cynical, and think they have proved it when they have made out that he could be kind and affectionate, and stick to his friends. All this and much more may be true of a man, and yet he may have the cynical taint in him. Or he may be dangerously capable of catching it, and yet be vehemently anti-cynical in all his set, specific, explicit deliverances. Hawthorne is a case in point. In a moment we shall, I hope, see how all this is true. There is, again, a way in which a man may come very close, indeed, in the forms of *spiel-trieb*, or sport impulse, which his mind takes to, and yet he may be a man to whom cynicism proper is impossible. Jean Paul is a case in point,—but his simplicity saves him, if not his affectionateness. Fielding is another case of the kind,—and his warm, undisguised attachment to his own puppets saves him. But it would be endless to cite illustrations, and not very profitable, unless they were thoroughly exploited.

Now let us run over a few of the names, the very mention of which is an anticynical prophylactic. Sir Walter Scott, Washington, Milton, Garibaldi, Channing, Collingwood, Mazzini, Victor Hugo, Thomas Hood. Of all these you can say at once, that the smell of the fire has not even passed upon the mere garments of their souls. Of others, whose names are prophylactic also, you cannot affirm as much. Wordsworth, for example, is powerfully anticynical; but we not only know that he had a fight with the dragon at one time of his life, we find traces of the combat in his writings. There is nothing indelicate in referring here to a living poet who has deliberately shown us the inside of his mind in this matter. The anonymous author of the "In Memoriam" tells very plainly in that poem what a fight with the dragon he once had to sustain; and, since he is identified with the author of "Maud" and "The Two Voices," there is no harm in placing the story told in the anonymous poem side by side with what may be gathered from the poems that are not anonymous. The truth is that the cynical passages in Mr. Tennyson's writings are among the most powerful things he has written. There are passages in "Maud" which almost make you uncomfortable, they are so strong. But in Milton, Channing, and Mazzini, we cannot find the faintest sign of the battle ever having been fought. There is not a scar on their foreheads, or a reminiscence in their accent. Victor Hugo may seem a doubtful instance, but I cannot find in his writings that he has ever been called to a conflict that was for an hour a doubtful one. There is something singularly open and defiant in his exhibition of the pain and misery he finds in the world. He may even be said to parade it, but it is with the unwavering triumph of a very strong man. So, if only for the sake

of seeing whether or not other people's impression of him agrees with mine, his name shall remain on that side of my list.

Sir Walter Scott is so striking an example in point, that we may start from him as an illustration in referring to the moral and other indications which are unfavourable to the growth of cynicism. First of all, whatever pain he suffered, he was a well-built man; with large viscera, and plenty of room for them. This is a considerable matter; but far more to the point is the fact that he was a man of strong attachments, and upright in all his relations with his friends. That he was naturally sanguine is, of course, important also, and it goes far to excuse his kite-flying in matters of business. It is also of great consequence that he was a man of no great subtlety of mind; scarcely capable of drifting away from any inherited anchorage of traditional belief; and that, his idealism not being of the highest, or even of a high order, he was not exposed to the trials of faith which came to those who try to live like Uriel in the sun, and have too often to learn that they cannot do anything of the kind. He was not a man to see farther than he could reach, and had to see no troops of longings and efforts come back to him broken and dispirited,—none, I mean, of the kind which an eager conscience sends out behind the advanced guard of the imagination. He was not a cynic, and he never could have been one. Now let us turn to some of the other names,—Milton, Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Victor Hugo. In all these there is immense moral warmth and a ceaseless plunging and curvetting of the imagination. But there is a corresponding moral force, and we may say that the men are not capable of cynicism because they are so strong that they cannot even be tempted. Garibaldi, besides the advantage of moral force, has that of being naturally very sanguine; and of course he has not the far-reaching intellectual subtlety of Victor Hugo. Nor had Milton, of whom it may safely be affirmed that he was scarcely capable of even seeing the problems which, to men like Heine and Wordsworth, might come haunting in ghostly battalions.

One thing strikes the mind immediately these names are placed in file. Of Milton, Wordsworth, Mazzini, and Garibaldi, it may almost be affirmed that they had not an ounce of humour between them. Victor Hugo has but little, and what he has is of a very peculiar kind. Now, humour or wit will not make a man a cynic, because,—as I have shown,—Hood is entitled, in my opinion, to a place among those on whom the smell of the fire has not passed; and Sydney Smith was as far from being a cynic as was very well possible. Sterne, too, was no cynic; and “*Tristram Shandy*,” for all its coarseness, and for all the outrageously inhuman things * which

* One of the outbreaks which I have in my eye ran somewhat as follows:—“This author rightly and grandly detests Sterne. Fling him out upon the dunghill of God’s universe! Lie there, thou filthy, obscene, lying, canting, maudlin, profane hypocrite!” and so forth. There is plenty in Sterne that

have been said of its author, is as anti-cynical as the "Vicar of Wakefield." Yet the remark attributed to Sydney Smith,—and perhaps to be found in his writings,—that wit and humour had done much to corrupt mankind, had a meaning. It is, however, much more true of humour than of wit,—I mean in the sense in which it is true at all. The fact is that humour, spying out weak places, and those points in men and things which are incongruous with their pretensions, is a great leveller, and, in that way, under certain conditions, is favourable to cynicism. It is usually associated, too, with mental subtlety, as wit with acuteness. Its comparative infrequency in women is one reason why they are so seldom found cynical. Another reason, among many, is the greater activity of their affections and gregarious sympathies,—which are facts, deny them who pleases in that silly fashion of denial which has lately sprung up. Another is the fact that as they are seldom engaged in considerable or hazardous enterprises or ambitions, they are not so liable as men to reflections upon the gulf between the attempt and the performance, or to the pangs which attend upon the repulse of vigorous effort. A woman sometimes falls into sheer despair upon some defeat or robbing of the affections; but she is seldom, perhaps never, cynical unless she happens to be a humorist. She also wants the moral discursiveness of most men. It was this want of moral discursiveness,—a want which usually accompanies the absence of intellectual subtlety,—which made it impossible that Dickens should ever have been cynical.

Perhaps in the course of this skirmishing we have lighted upon answers, or hints of answers, to the questions with which we started; but we may now attempt, changing the metaphor, to draw together the loose threads of illustration into one strand of thought. Some of the better class of the conditions least favourable to cynicism,—in the more serious sense of the word,—are health, affectionateness, honesty, seriousness, and whatever goes to make moral force. In the lower class of these unfavourable conditions may be ranked stupidity, good health, good fortune, inaptitude to break old moulds of belief, and want of humour. Among the conditions obviously favourable to cynicism are desperate personal suffering, especially if prolonged, collision with aggravated forms of human badness, especially treachery, and almost anything which creates a sense of great disparity between the apparently natural destiny of the individual and his lot. The sufferings of Heine were, for example, of such a character as to generate this sense of disparity. The list of conditions of each kind might be indefinitely prolonged; and among those which are favourable to the growth of cynicism shallow personal affections must take a high place. I am thinking of more than one person, living and dead, as I write this; but particularly of Napoleon,

deserves strong condemnation, and excites still stronger disgust, but it is inhuman to spit in the face of the man who drew my Uncle Toby.

who, whatever attachments he inspired, was himself nearly destitute of the capacity of loving. And no creature born of woman ever made a more horribly cynical speech than that which he made about the carnage on a field of battle. It was a reference to the great reparative forces of nature. "Un nuit de Paris," said he, with a stress upon the "un,"—but the sentence is unquotable. Some of the things written by Dean Swift are, however, as bad. In his case, however, an immense natural fastidiousness,—itself a good thing, but favourable in most minds to the growth of cynicism,—was united not only with a great want of the capacity of loving, but with other unhappy moral qualities, and, as is conjectured, with a rare and peculiar personal defect, well qualified to embitter him.

Cynicism is a word which would, of course, be differently defined by different people, and a formal definition of it is, in fact, not necessary. What it practically means to the modern moralist, and what these comments have been converging upon is, that form of scepticism which, having a moral basis, breaks up the divine hierarchy in human motives and actions and in the facts of life and nature, and sets aside, as a pleasantry, the order of lower and higher,—except when to recognise it serves a certain end. That end is, the immediate gratification of the person concerned. The cynical voluptuary is as common as paving-stones; but he is a grossly ridiculous personage, for, before a man can become thoroughly cynical, he must have parted with the best part of his capacity for enjoyment. And a man may take it as a sign that he has done that when he finds himself hunting up pleasure; making it the goal or prize of his life; and weighing it nicely in the scales of anticipation or recollection.

The course by which any man may arrive at the worst form of cynicism is very simple. Go and do something you know to be wrong, and persist in it. In a very short time you will find you are of the opinion that "there's nothing new and nothing true, and that it doesn't matter;" or, possibly, of a still more deadly opinion than even that carries upon the open face of it,—

"Thy duty? What is duty? Fare-thee-well."

For arriving at the milder forms of the disease it is not necessary to go and forcibly outrage your conscience. All you need do is to devote your days as much as you possibly can to your own pleasure. Then, if you happen to have humour, intelligence, and culture, you will probably develop into a cynic; though not perhaps of the bitterest and most virulent order. The essential pre-requisite is that you should somehow be in a false—by which I mean distinctly a falsified—position. If you have wilfully done what you believe to be wrong, and have never repented or tried to expiate it, you will find yourself utterly out of rapport with the great current of things. The stars in their courses will fight against you, and the sound of a

shaken leaf will put you in fear. If, to take the milder case, you are merely self-indulgent and exacting in the matter of your pleasures, you will again find yourself in a false position; for nothing will ever satisfy you, and when they find they cannot get the More! for which they incessantly cry out, your desires will turn and rend you; or, at the lowest, mock you. And you will be sure to let us know that you take their gibes for wisdom.

That more serious kind of the cynical criticism of life which amounts to a regular depreciation of its higher aims and better labours is founded upon an error which it is very easy to signalise. If the conscience of an observer has been depraved by wilful wrongdoing, he immediately inclines to note and dwell upon the worst or weaker part of the character of each individual; not necessarily to rejoice in it, which would be devilish, but to watch the power which the wrong part in a man may have of defeating the right part in him. But all the while he is imperfectly sensible of the great fact that the good and right are still in the ascendant, or, in other words, that, in the mass, excess and defect correct each other, so that collective man is a very different creature from A. or B. taken at hazard out of a crowd. This is, indeed, a very poor way of putting the case, which might be made much stronger; but room must now be made for a word about cynical criticism of a less malignant order. This chiefly exhibits itself in running down vulgar enthusiasms, and questioning, in a scientific vein, the accuracy of those instinctive generalisations which play so large a part in human affairs. With regard to the vulgar enthusiasms, it is a curious thing that while the great humorists often make us smile at them, they always show them in their true light,—that is, as fortresses or entrenched camps made by the better part of the average human mind in its haste to go about its business. We cannot always be stopping to chop logic concerning degrees of heroism or genius in history and literature; just as in life, we find the best-hearted people choose their friends and stick to them, without pausing every now and then to revise the grounds on which their choice was made. With regard to the rough instinctive generalisations, everything depends on what they are about. It is perfectly true that, as Mr. Carlyle puts it, men are "mostly fools," or, as Mr. Mill puts it, not one man in a hundred is fitted to form an opinion on any matter but his own immediate interest; but if there is one thing worse than the folly of the ignorant, it is the conceit of the cynical expert who attacks every question with a three-foot rule, a row of figures, and a small sarcasm.

An editorial hint that I am exceeding my space compels me to omit much, and particularly the very important point of the way in which humour, under the most usual conditions, tends not to assist, but to hinder cynicism. However, its operation is pretty obvious, and the names of Hood, Goldsmith, and Addison are enough to illustrate it.

A BALLAD OF ZUTPHEN FIGHT.

OCTOBER 2ND, 1586.

(*Vide* Motley's "United Netherlands," ii., 44—57.)

I.

THE years were nine and twenty
Of our great Lady's reign,
When she bade us follow Leicester,
God knows we followed fain—
To help the Dutchmen break the yoke
Of the curs'd Philip of Spain.

We numbered scarce six thousand—
Save Dutchmen—horse and foot;
But each had a heart to dare and a
hand

Withal to strike or shoot;
And was well worth a brace of Spani-
ards,

And a Frenchman or two to boot.

No leader for us but Leicester,
Maugre the Jesuits' spite!
Little their babbling moved us
On whom the heartening sight
Of his hawk's face and his foamy beard
Gleamed i' the thick o' the fight.

No comrades dearer than Norris,
Gentle tho' grim as a pall;
Stern Willoughby, fiery Essex,
Will Russell brawny and tall,
And gallant Sir Philip Sidney,
The noblest knight o' them all.

We reaped good store of buffets
Skirmishing up and down:
By Axel's moat, at Doesburg's gates,
We won our laurel crown;
But we prize no victory like defeat,
By the walls of Zutphen town.

A pleasant place in peace-time
Is Zutphen town, I trow,
As it sleeps with its quaint red gables
Beside the Yssel's flow,
Where market-boats with broad white
sails
Glide slowly to and fro.

But alack! what tumult and ruin
We wrought in the quiet land!
We planted a bridge o'er the river,
And a camp on either strand:
The ruddy orchards and golden ricks
We ravaged with axe and brand!

So making allies with Famine,
Our cannon blared at the wall;
And tidings came to Parma
That shrewdly stirred his gall,
How, stormed without and starved
within,
Zutphen must surely fall.

Then thro' the land for victual
He foraged far and wide;
Loaded his wains, and summoned
His motley army's pride,
Spaniards, Epirotes, Lombards,
To march as a guard beside.

There came into our trenches
Two spies at close of day,
With tidings that the convoy
Ere then was on its way;
A thousand horse and foot, they swore,
Ill harnessed for a fray.

Then Leicester called black Norris—
"To-morrow, say the spies,
"The convoy halts at Warnesfeld:
Set on it at sunrise:
An ambush of five hundred strong
Will lightly snatch the prize."

Now God on the knaves take ven-
geance
Whose treachery made us mourn!
Had we deemed the odds twice trebled
They bade us laugh to scorn,
We had scarce let Sidney stake his life
For waggons of beef and corn!

II.

In the chill October morning
The mists hung dense and grey,
As 'neath the red-leaved coverts
In ambuscade we lay,
Silent to catch the distant sound
Of the convoy on its way.

Three hundred marched with Stanley,
Their pikes for onset drest;
Two hundred rode with Norris,
Swords drawn, and spears in rest:
Never a bolder company
Death to its bosom prest!

The convoy-sounds grow nearer,
Hoof-tramp and grinding wheel;
When hark! thro' the mists behind us
The clanging of friendly steel!
'Tis a score of our noblest gallants
Harnessed from head to heel!

Willoughby, Sidney, Essex;
North, who with wounds unhealed,
Upleaping from his pallet
When our last trumpet pealed,
Now, "one boot on and one boot off,"
Rides gaily to the field.

Will Russell, Pelham, Audley,
With heroes of their kind,
Scenting the distant perfume
Of battle on the wind,
Jealous that Death should seek us first,
Disdain to stay behind!

Scarce have we given them greeting
When the mists clear away:
Full morning breaks on the convoy-
lines
Marshalled in battle-array;
And lo! three thousand fighting men
Stand in our path to-day!

Nigh twenty deep in the vanguard
The Spanish bowmen stride;
Behind with brandished lances
The wild Epirotes ride;
And Lombard pikes and muskets gleam
The rolling wains beside.

Swart Bentivoglio's stature,
Del Vasto's haughty mien,
Crescia's begemmed tiara,
Gonzaga's broidered sheen;
Power and splendour, steel and gold,
Flash in our marvelling cyne!

Marvelling, ay! and fearing:
Down all our ranks in turn,
Each reads his neighbour's eye in fear
A faint heart to discern;
Then, reassured, upon the foe
Settles content and stern.

Black Norris cries to Stanley,
"Henceforth let us forego
Our ancient feud and make one cause
Against our Sovereign's foe!"
Then Stanley, "If I fail thee now,
May God requite me so!"

"Strike for the Queen!" shouts Essex;
"Forward for England's sake!"
A cry, a clatter of reins, a charge
That makes the stout earth quake;
Then, all their dense lines rent in gaps,
The Spanish bowmen break.

Death in each drop, a torrent
The Lombard muskets rain,
But aye our stalwart pikemen
Their onward march sustain,
That we recoiling for bare breath
May lead the charge again.

Again we charge right forward,
Bearing down man and horse;
Essex ahead with axe in grip,
Swayed by so dire a force,
You may trace his wake at every
stroke
Marked by a Spanish corse.

Low in the fosse rolls Crescia,
Unhorsed by Willoughby's spear,
But rising to upyield his sword
Owneth nor shame nor fear,
Knowing that honour and life are safe
With an English cavalier.

Trailed in the dust to gleam no more
Is the broiderery Gonzaga wears;
Del Vasto's pride from a trooper's pike
A single sword-cut spares;
No memory grimmer than to-day's
Grim Bentivoglio bears.

The might of English thews till now
Never a Spaniard wist;
How Russell's arm like a millstone
grinds
With steel and bone for grist;
How deadly is the dexterous fence
Of Sidney's matchless wrist.

But banded onsets have no strength,
 And single arms no weight,
 To hold the convoy in its course
 Forward to Zutphen's gate,
 Whereat a fearful famished crew
 Its coming doth await.

Vainly in one last charge we try
 To stem the battle's tide :
 The surge of numbers still sweeps
 on

Ah ! that we had not tried !
 For England lost in that last charge
 The marvel of her pride.

Sidney, as ever, first o' the van,
 Latest to quit the field,
 Struck by a gunshot on the limb
 He had disdained to shield,
 Lest one dear friend risk more than
 he,*
 There from the saddle reeled.

Borne tentwards, he with lips aflame
 For water, craved a draught ;
 But halting where a trooper lay
 Pierced with a Lombard shaft,
 Bethought the wistful dying eyes
 Reproached him ere he quaffed.

"Thy need than mine is greater :
 "Drink, friend!" the hero said ;
 Then having pledged his fellow in
 death,
 Passed onward where the bed
 Of pain awhile detained him. God
 Released him and he fled.

Thus did we lose at Zutphen
 Our bravest and our best ;
 But if against Spain and the Devil
 God on us lay his hest
 To spare a hundred Sidneys more,
 England will stand the test.

* Sir William Pelham : Vide Greville's Memoir of Sidney.

THE STOCK EXCHANGE.

ONE morning, late in the autumn of 1866, before commencing my round of visits to my patients, a letter was brought me from Mrs. X., residing in one of the newly-built fashionable squares in Bayswater, requesting me to call on her without fail in the course of the day. Although I was in the habit of receiving frequent communications from that lady, this note somewhat puzzled me, from the mysterious manner in which it was worded. Probably, after all, the mysterious element which I imagined I had detected in it, might have arisen from the generally explicit phraseology Mrs. X. was in the habit of using when writing to me. It should be understood, however, that the frequent letters I received from her, if not of a description always openly to be quoted in polite conversation, contained in them nothing that could in the slightest manner be used to her disadvantage.

Mrs. X. was the wife of a man of property, which he had a few years before somewhat unexpectedly inherited. Although of good education, it would be wrong to say he was a man of superior ability. He was also of good family;—not so his wife, who was the daughter of a small tradesman in the country, and not overburdened with brains, still less with education, which on frequent occasions was visible in the orthography of her letters. When Mr. X. married her, she was exceedingly attractive in appearance, and it is but justice to her to say, that up to the date of my narrative, time had treated her with every consideration; in fact, he had merely changed the very pretty girl into the handsome matronly woman. Unfortunately for Mrs. X., in one respect, the accession of fortune which her husband had received, by no means improved her mental qualifications. True, although the amiable good-nature so fully developed in her when a girl, had apparently considerably diminished in proportion as, what she called, her position in society had improved; from the frequent visits I had to pay her family,—she was blessed with no fewer than seven children,—I had good opportunity of perceiving it was latent in her. She was in every respect an excellent mother, watching over her children with great kindness and consideration, and I may here remark, that the many notes I was in the habit of receiving from her, related generally to their maladies or sanitary condition.

As a wife, I can hardly speak of Mrs. X. in as high terms. In making this remark, however, it must be understood I do not in

any way refer to impropriety of demeanour, for in that respect a more honourable woman it would be difficult to find. At the same time, as her husband became richer, she hardly paid that regard to his wishes and idiosyncracies which he merited. He was naturally of a quiet, contented disposition; nor did his newly-acquired wealth in the slightest degree make any alteration in his manner of thinking, or,—if he had been allowed to have his own way,—in his unostentatious habits. Mrs. X., on the contrary, insisted on their living in a style befitting their means, hypocritically abjuring on her own part any love of show or splendour, merely proposing it, she maintained, for the purpose of introducing her children, who were now growing up, into a better class of society than they had hitherto been accustomed to associate with. For some time Mr. X. reasoned with his wife on the folly of her ambition, but it was useless. He at last acceded to her wishes, and took the lease of a mansion in — Square, furnished it in a most luxurious manner, his wife insisting that as in all probability the furniture would last them their lifetime, they might as well have it of the best description. A few months afterwards they left their house in the country, and took up their residence in London.

To return to my note from Mrs. X. In it, as I said before, she requested me to call on her in the course of the day, and said, if possible, she should like to see me about two o'clock, as she would then be alone. Her note evidently showed that this time it was neither her children nor her husband who was ill. On driving from one patient's house to another, before calling on Mrs. X., I occasionally found myself divining what particular communication she could have to make to me, and each time the conclusion I arrived at was one of a very interesting description. However, my conclusions were as nought on the subject, for I afterwards found I had been totally in error.

On my arrival in — Square, I was shown by the servant into the parlour, and a few minutes afterwards Mrs. X. entered the room. When I saw her, I of course took a professional glance of her face to judge, if possible, what particular cause it was which induced her to send for me, for I am one of a certain class in the profession—possibly not so numerous as it ought to be—who consider that every disease has its particular expression in the countenance of the patient, which constitutes a far more valuable diagnostic than is generally imagined. The expression on Mrs. X.'s countenance, however, puzzled me extremely. Though naturally of a somewhat florid complexion, she was now exceedingly pale; yet it was rather the pallor arising from continued anxiety than positive ill-health. Moreover, she wore a look of painful doubt, which seemed greatly out of place on her features, for, although occasionally I had seen her out of temper, it was simply a temporary ebullition which soon passed

away, totally different from the care and thought now so plainly visible.

She also appeared to have some objection to allude to the subject she had wished to see me upon, and after the few first ordinary expressions on meeting, instead of immediately, as was her wont, bringing forward the subject prominent in her mind, she spoke on general topics of the day, as if wishing to put off till the last moment a communication which might very probably be of a painful description. At last, and as if making a sudden effort, she said—

"I wish to speak to you, doctor, about my husband; for, to tell you the truth, he makes me very uneasy. Haven't you noticed lately a great change in him?"

"I have not seen him for some time," I replied. "Fortunately, it is now two months since you had occasion for my services, and even then I did not see Mr. X."

"I remember you did not," she remarked. "He was at the time very busy, and, in fact, is so now; indeed, I am afraid it has a very prejudicial effect on his health, and I wanted to consult you about him."

"Of what does he complain?" I inquired.

"There is the difficulty," said Mrs. X. "He does not complain of anything; if he did, we might know what would do him good. He seems to get weaker and weaker, but if I speak to him on the subject, he merely answers me fractionally, that there is nothing the matter with him. So angrily does he say this," she continued, the tears coming into her eyes as she spoke, "that it makes me feel quite miserable."

"But what have you noticed in him which should cause you so much anxiety?" I asked.

"Well, one thing is his loss of appetite, which not only has fallen off, but when he does eat, he seems totally indifferent to what is set before him. And then again, his manners are so strange. Why, the other evening after he had come home from the City, he entered the drawing-room, and without taking the least notice of me, walked to an easy chair, and seating himself in it, gazed at the fire as if his whole thoughts were concentrated on it. I confess I was a little nettled at this behaviour, so I said nothing to him, but let him sit quietly. Presently the man came into the room and told us dinner was on the table. Still my husband made no remark. I rose from my chair, and was on the point of leaving the room, when, not wishing to appear unkind, I turned round to speak to him. To my surprise, I found him still in the same position, gazing at the fire, apparently unconscious even of the footman's entrance. I then went to him, and touching him gently on the shoulder, said, 'My dear, did you not hear the man say dinner was ready?' He looked round at me, and for a moment stared vacantly in my face. Then, rising

from his chair, he gave me his arm, and as he moved towards the door, said, less as if speaking to me than thinking aloud, 'I thought we had dined.'

"Do not let that alarm you," I said. "Very possibly Mr. X. had had a fatiguing day, or his mind might have been occupied at the time with something which deeply interested him, or, perhaps, caused him some anxiety."

"What anxiety?" she said, somewhat sharply.

"That, of course, I do not know," I replied. "I merely mentioned it as a cause for the state of deep abstraction he appears to have been in."

"Of course there is nothing whatever for him to be anxious about," said Mrs. X.; "and that worries me the more." Here she was silent for a moment, as if she doubted her last statement to be true, much as she wished it to be so. Then, as if purposely making an abrupt change in the current of her thoughts, she continued, "What I want to speak to you particularly about took place yesterday evening. We were at dinner, and it struck me that he ate with a good deal more appetite than usual, which pleased me greatly. To tell you the truth, I had begun to be alarmed about him, having heard he had taken no breakfast before leaving the house in the morning. Not being very well myself, I did not get up in time to see him before he went. Well, we had nearly finished dinner, when he said he did not feel very well; and rising from his chair, as if to leave the room, he fell senseless on the floor in a fainting fit. With some difficulty we managed to get him round, and I told the man to go off for you at once. Mr. X., however, forbade him, as he said he should soon be better. I determined, however, as soon as he left the house this morning, to write to you; so, if you see him, you must not let him know that I have spoken to you on the subject."

"Certainly not," I replied. "But, if he fainted yesterday evening, you ought not to have let him leave the house this morning."

"How could I help it?" she said. "I have now no control over him whatever. What do you think caused his fainting fit last evening?"

"You say that he had no breakfast in the morning, and possibly he may have had no luncheon in the middle of the day. If so, the hearty dinner of which he had rapidly partaken might rather have increased his exhaustion for the moment than strengthened him. But unless I see him it will be impossible for me to prescribe for him."

"Well, call some day. To-morrow, Sunday, he is sure to be in. Merely come as if you were paying us a visit, and then you will be better able to judge of his state of health than by any description I can give of it."

I promised I would do so, and after a little more conversation with Mrs. X. on general subjects took my leave.

The following day, according to our arrangement, I called again in — Square, and found Mr. X. at home. Although when I first saw him he was surrounded by his family, of whom he was intensely fond, and generally most cheerful when in their society, he now appeared gloomy and abstracted. He was also exceedingly pale, and there was an appearance of strong anxiety over his features. So deeply was it marked as totally to conceal the expression of failing health, or malady, from which he was evidently suffering. So absorbed was he when I entered that he appeared unable to recall my features, and he gazed at me for a moment with a bewildered look. On one of his children calling me by my name he recovered himself, and received me in his usual friendly manner. We entered into conversation on general subjects, Mrs. X., who was seated at the farther end of the room, watching us attentively the while.

After we had conversed for some few minutes he suddenly turned his gaze upon his wife, and a slight flush, apparently of anger, appeared on his countenance, but it immediately vanished. He then looked at me, and regarded me with evident suspicion. Still, we carried on the conversation for some time, he occasionally giving me that furtive, suspicious glance which a patient in the first stage of a mental disease so frequently casts on any medical man he may be talking with, and who he imagines may probably be trying to detect the malady he himself is aware he is suffering from. After a little time, however, Mr. X. became more himself, and when I had finished my visit, and was leaving the room, he accompanied me downstairs. When opposite his study door he somewhat abruptly said to me:—

“Come in here, Doctor; I want to speak to you.”

I went in, and as soon as he had closed the door, he said—

“I see that my wife has told you of my fainting fit the other evening.” I was somewhat puzzled what reply to make, when he continued: “I will not trouble you for a reply; but now tell me candidly, did she say anything else?”

I remained silent for some seconds, unable to conjure up an excuse to avoid the question. Mr. X. evidently saw my embarrassment, and said—

“Now, Doctor, let us clearly understand each other. I must have your reply, if we are to continue friends.”

“Well,” I said, “I hardly know whether it is a breach of professional etiquette on my part, but she merely told me she was in considerable alarm about your health, and that you seemed extremely abstracted and anxious.”

“I won’t ask you any further question, Doctor,” he said; “although I can easily perceive my wife said more about me, and that she herself is anxious as to the state of my mind. And she has good cause to be so,” he continued, his voice faltering, and

regarding me the while with a terrified look,—“she has good reason to be so. I am——”

“Be assured of this,” I said, interrupting him, “nothing is more likely to bring it on than silently brooding over a subject of the kind. Many mental diseases, which may be easily cured if taken in time, become incurable if allowed to run on.”

“I have no mental disease,” he said sharply; “but I am now suffering from a weight of anxiety on my mind, which, if not relieved, will destroy the few reasoning faculties I still possess. Doctor, I must speak to you on the subject; and yet what good can you possibly do me?” continued the wretched man, the tears gathering in his eyes. “Neither you nor all the physicians in London can benefit me.”

“I think you do the profession an injustice,” I said.

“Is it not one of the first principles in your treatment of a malady to remove, if possible, the exciting cause?”

“Granted,” I replied.

“Well, then, to remove that exciting cause in my case,” he said, looking wildly at me, “would cost you triple the fortune I possess.”

“I do not understand you,” I said.

“Well, then, the sole exciting cause of the mental malady I can see you imagine I am suffering from, may be summed up in one plain word—*anxiety*. But I will not talk more with you to-day, or I shall go fairly out of my mind. Call and see me often, but do not let it be known that yours are professional visits, or at any rate, if you do, let it be understood that it merely arises from some slight bodily ailment—and nothing more.”

“When shall I call again?” I asked.

“Come to-morrow, and spend the evening with me. I will persuade my wife, if possible, to go out and see a friend, and we can then converse without the chance of being interrupted.”

I promised I would do so; and then, bidding him good-bye, left the house.

During my conversation with Mr. X. I noticed in him several of those preliminary symptoms which, if not stopped at the beginning, frequently lead to insanity or softening of the brain. I saw clearly enough that he wished, even then, to explain more particularly to me the state of his mind, but the natural aversion all men feel to admit anything to be wrong with their mental faculties restrained him. That there was no mental disease about him was certain; his mind was merely suffering from being overstrained. But then, what could be the cause? He was no hard student, nor did he interest himself either in politics, or social economy, or in any of the many philanthropic or religious enterprises of the present day. Neither could he have had any of those pecuniary losses to distress him which act so fatally on the minds of our great financiers, merchants, and bankers.

He was a man of fortune, without either profession or business to occupy him.

Although he frequently paid a visit to the City, and on his return home would talk with considerable animation on the principal financial operations of the day, he seemed to do it more as a hobby than from any other cause. The habit had originated possibly in the fact that many of his neighbours and associates were gentlemen interested in affairs of the kind; and, when they met, the state of the money or produce market, the value of shares of companies, formed, with an occasional touch on politics, the great staple of their conversation. The very absence of any probable cause for his present state of mind rendered me the more anxious on his account, as it appeared more like the germination of insanity, not stimulated by any known or external cause.

The next evening, as agreed, I called at Mr. X.'s house, but, to my surprise, not only found Mrs. X. at home, contrary to what I had expected, but that her husband was absent.

"Doctor," she said to me, "I feel most anxious about my husband. I expected he would have returned to dinner three hours since, and I have not heard a word from him."

"Possibly he may have been detained on some unexpected business. He has very likely sent some messenger to inform you of the cause of his absence, who may not have been able to find the house." This I said rather with the idea of consoling the poor woman than from having any data to go upon.

"I sincerely hope you may be right," she replied. "Still, it is very mysterious. I trust he has not had another fainting fit, which is very likely after what I told you occurred the other evening."

Several of the elder children now came into the room, and I could easily perceive from the expression of their countenances that they were scarcely less anxious about their father than was Mrs. X. herself. I endeavoured to keep up their spirits in the best way I could, but I found myself in one of those unfortunate positions which so frequently occur to medical men in large practice, where they have, without data to go upon, or possibly with the certainty of a calamity about to occur, to render some temporary consolation to those looking for it at their hands. Without, I trust, being guilty of any moral cowardice, I began to feel my position an exceedingly difficult and painful one. Finding I could do nothing more, I proposed taking my leave. Before quitting the house I inquired of Mrs. X. when I should call on her husband again. She asked me to come the next morning, but that I said was impossible, as I had an engagement I could not put off, but that I would call on the Wednesday evening if it would be equally convenient to her. Mrs. X. told me she would be much pleased to see me then, and taking my leave of them, I returned home.

On the Wednesday evening when I called in — Square, it was

some time before my ring at the bell was answered. The door was at last opened, not by the footman, but by a slatternly looking woman, who held in her hand a lighted candle in a common kitchen candlestick, the gas not being lighted in the hall. Somewhat surprised at the circumstance, I asked the woman if Mrs. X. was at home.

"No, sir," she replied. "She has gone away with all the children, but I believe Mr. X. is in, if he would do as well."

"Yes," I replied, "I should like to see him."

"Do you know if Mr. X. is at home?" said the woman, turning round and addressing a common looking man I had not yet seen, but who now advanced out of the obscurity at the farther end of the hall.

"I am not quite sure, but I think he's up-stairs," said the man.

"If you'll lend me your candle I'll go and see."

The woman gave the candle, and I was left alone with her in the hall. A few minutes afterwards the man returned and said that Mr. X. would be much pleased to see me, and he then conducted me into the study, where I was left in the dark, but shortly afterwards the woman came in with a couple of candles which she placed on the table.

I now remained alone for some minutes, wondering the while what could possibly have occurred to make such a metamorphosis in the house. The general air of gaiety and animation about it had now subsided into a stillness scarcely less than that of the grave. Instead of the brilliant appearance it usually presented in the evening, with the exception of the candles burning in the room where I now was, there seemed, so far as I could see through the open door, not a trace of light anywhere. The man and woman who had spoken to me puzzled me exceedingly. They were evidently strangers, and certainly not the regular servants. The woman had about her the look of the common charwoman, and the man, one of the lower class of tradesmen, something like those hanging about the door of a house when an auction is about to take place in it. In fact, had I not known that Mr. X. was the possessor of very considerable property, I should have imagined the man I had seen was a broker in possession.

Mr. X. now entered the room, and after greeting me in a very cordial manner, regretted that he had given me the trouble of calling on the Monday evening, excusing himself by saying that he had been detained in town by business, and that, too, of a nature he could not put off. We now seated ourselves, and I cast my usual professional glance on his face. I found in the expression a considerable change from what I had noticed on the previous Sunday. All anxiety had now vanished, and in its place was a look of calm sorrow.

"A great change has come over the appearance of the house since you last saw it," he said. "I suppose you can guess the reason."

"Indeed I cannot," I replied, with perfect good faith.

"Well, I will tell you then," he said. "Do you remember during our conversation on Sunday I told you that to remove the exciting cause of the malady you imagined I was labouring under, would cost three times the whole fortune I possess. You evidently at the moment appeared to consider there was something like absurdity in my remark." I am now about to prove to you its perfect truth. I am hopelessly bankrupt, and I fear my estate will not pay seven shillings in the pound. After I have given up every farthing I possess in the world, with the exception of the interest on five thousand pounds which has been settled on my wife, about two hundred a year will be for the future all we and our seven children have to live upon. My wife and the children have now gone to a friend in the country who has kindly taken them in. I shall remain in town for some time longer in a small lodging on the other side of the water till my affairs are wound up. The lease and furniture of the house will be sold by auction next week."

I was aghast at the information, and remained for some moments silent, Mr. X. the while watching me attentively.

"I always thought you were a man of large fortune," I said to him at last.

"So did most others," he replied. "You must, however, clearly understand I never was a man of large fortune—one of good property would have been the more correct term. My income never exceeded £1,500 a year, and in fact was generally nearer £1,200. Till I had come into the property you heard of, we lived in a very modest manner in the country, and the first step to my ruin was taking this house and furnishing it in the very expensive manner I did. At the time I did not calculate that the larger the house the greater would be the contingent expenses connected with it. We had more expensive servants, more expensive ideas, numerous luxuries to which we had hitherto been totally indifferent, and possibly were so when we had them, only we were informed they were necessary to keep up an appearance. We were obliged to have a carriage, although I believe my wife and myself cared but little about it. The dinners we gave became the more expensive in proportion as the friends we made were the wealthier. They gave us most luxurious dinners, and it would have been derogatory on our part not to have returned them.

"Beyond that, the good and economical school to which we had hitherto sent our younger boys, was discovered to be beneath their future position in society. They must be sent to Harrow and Eton to make acquaintances who, as my wife argued, would, as they grew up, be of great use to them. I attempted to prove to her that both King's College and the London University were excellent schools, where the education was at least quite equal to either Eton or

Harrow, and the expense would be one-fourth. Mrs. X. was, however, inexorable. All her friends told her that if the education was not superior, the boys acquired at Harrow and Eton a tone which it would be perfectly impossible for them to get either at the King's College or the London University. My wife, as usual, had her own way in the matter, and the cost of the two boys' education was little less than four hundred a year.

"We had not been settled in London more than two years before I perceived that my income was not equal to my expenditure. It was some time after I had discovered this unpleasant fact before I had the courage to submit it to my wife. At last I perceived the moral cowardice of keeping it longer a secret, and I resolved to tell her all. The disclosure took place one morning after breakfast, when she had asked me for an unusually large cheque for household expenses. I demurred somewhat at the amount, saying, that instead of increasing our expenditure we must diminish it. I told her that, unpleasant as the truth might appear, my current expenses were greater than my income. Instead of being, as I had expected, overwhelmed with sorrow at the intelligence, she merely replied, 'Then why don't you do something to increase it?' I told her I would willingly if I saw the way. 'See the way!' she exclaimed. 'If I were a man I would soon see the way. Look at many of our friends. There's A, and B, and C; you don't suppose that their private incomes are greater than yours? and yet they live in twice the style we do, and pay their way too.' 'But men in business have a way of making money that those who are out of it have not,' I replied. 'But these are not men in business,' said my wife; 'at least B. and C. are not.' 'I don't see how they can make their money then,' I remarked to her. 'Why by going into the City,' said my wife; 'that's the way. Oh! you may shrug your shoulders, if you like,' she continued; 'but what I say is a fact. Now I'll give you an example. Look at W., whose house we are going to dine at to-day. He was never what you call regularly in business. Why, I am told he spends more than three hundred a year in raising early strawberries, and you know his place at Clapham is more like a palace than a gentleman's house. If you have an opportunity after dinner to-day, why not speak to him about the best way of making money? I am sure he will tell you, and give you very good advice too; he is so kind-hearted and liberal.'

"Although," continued Mr. X., "I had generally paid but very little attention to my wife's opinions, I resolved for once to follow her advice; for certainly W.'s career was a mystery to me. He was a very plausible, good-tempered fellow, of no particular ability, had not been brought up, I believe, to either trade or profession, was possessed of a small independent income, and had taken to City financial operations

merely by way of occupying his time. He had been so successful that he was now a man of immense wealth. Moreover, no one ever whispered a word against the manner in which he had acquired it.

"There was no dinner party the day we dined at W.'s house. He had merely invited a few friends, and of these two had disappointed him. When the ladies had retired after dinner, of course finance operations were brought forward. The conversation was commenced by one of the guests saying to W. (who had been unusually silent during dinner) that he did not seem very well. 'To say the truth,' said W., 'it is rather anxiety than ill health that is weighing on me just now. At the European Credit Association to-day, of which I am chairman, we have been auditing our last half-year's accounts, and the dividend we shall declare is far less than we had given our shareholders reason to anticipate. We might make it more, as many other companies would do, but I object to paying dividends except out of legitimate profits. We had hoped this half year to have paid a dividend at the rate of fifty per cent. per annum, and I am sorry to say thirty will be the utmost we can declare.' I said to W., 'If your shareholders are discontented with thirty per cent. they must be very difficult to please.' 'Why,' he replied, 'if, before three years are over our heads, we don't make it sixty, I am no true prophet.'

"Although I thought," continued Mr. X., "his ideas none of the soundest, there was at any rate the positive fact that his company would in a week or two pay a dividend at the rate of thirty per cent. per annum, and then the advice of my wife to increase my income came vividly before me. In fact, for many hours after I was in bed, I could not close my eyes, and it was only when at last I had resolved that the next morning I would meet W. in the City, and talk over with him the advisability of investing some of my capital in his company, that I was able to obtain any sleep.

"I will not detain you by narrating the particulars of my interview with W. Suffice it to say, I invested £5,000 of my capital in his company. True I bought the shares at an enormous premium, but then, as he pointed out to me, I had purchased them with the dividend about to be declared, which would make a great difference in my favour. I told my wife what I had done, and she complimented me highly on what she termed my prudence and foresight. Months passed on, and during their progress, so far from having cause to regret my venture, the shares rose to a premium considerably higher than I had paid for them. In fact, had I realised at the time, I should have made a very large profit. Instead of doing this, however, I purchased more shares, though not to any great amount. Then there came a lull, and their price remained stationary till the next dividend was declared, which was of the same amount as the last. The directors in their report apologised that the dividend was

not higher, but at the same time reminded the shareholders that at thirty per cent. their profits contrasted very favourably with those of many of the leading companies of the day.

"The price of the shares now remained stationary for some months, when suddenly there was a considerable fall. I inquired of W. the reason, and he told me it arose solely from the immense number of bubble companies which were starting up, and drawing off such a vast amount of capital. At the same time there was not the slightest reason for me to be under any uneasiness, for they were going on in a most satisfactory manner.

"A further fall in the shares took place, and I again called on W. for information. Although he received me in his usual frank manner, it struck me there was an expression of great anxiety on his features. When I spoke to him on the object of my visit, he said, after a little hesitation, 'Well, I will tell you candidly the cause of the present fall. The fact is, we have lost considerably by one of our speculations, and we shall pay no dividend this half year, notwithstanding that we have made a large profit, which we think better however to place to capital, especially as we can now see our way to an admirable investment. If you will take my advice, while the shares are so low you should invest in them. I have done so, being fully persuaded that before three months have elapsed, they will be higher than they ever have been.'

"Although," continued Mr. X., "there was a considerable amount of reason in all he said, I declined making any further purchases from the company. True, I deliberated for some time, when a friend, who was himself largely engaged in financial operations, and who was aware that I had invested in W.'s company, and that there was no chance of a dividend that half year, told me it was always dangerous to be a holder of shares in companies which proposed to pay such an enormous dividend, their security generally being the more doubtful in proportion as the dividend they paid was the higher. 'Now,' said he, 'if you really want to invest in a good thing, I will tell you of one. They are going to form Overend and Gurney's into a company which will be as sure as the bank. I will put your name down for a couple of hundred shares, if you like—that is to say, if I can get them, for they will be much run after; and, mark my words, they will be issued at a good premium.'

"Well, I followed his advice and invested in them, and his prophecy came true. At one time I could have sold my shares for more than £2,000 profit. I then invested in the Peruvian railways, and the Credit Foncier of England, the Marseilles Improvement Company, and other enterprises of the same description, all of which for some time progressed admirably. Even W.'s company, to a great extent, recovered itself, although never to the price I had paid for my shares in it. I was now the possessor of a very large income,

and began to consider myself an adept in financial operations. And I now admitted my wife was correct in sending the boys to Eton.

"Things went on smoothly enough till one day we were to have a large dinner party. I left home in the morning in high spirits to see how things were going on in the City, and did not return till it was barely time to dress for dinner, in fact I kept the company waiting for more than half an hour before I made my appearance. What took place at that dinner party, or who were the guests, I cannot now remember, nor could I perhaps have answered the question five minutes after they had left the house. As soon as we were alone, my wife said to me, 'Are you not well, dear? You look so pale; everybody noticed it, and you were so silent at table.' I looked at her for a moment, and was upon the point of telling her that not only had I in the course of the day received intelligence that W.'s company was found to be in a state of utter insolvency, and the money I had invested in it was lost, but that so deplorable was the state of its finances, that in all probability I should have to pay £5,000 on the unpaid calls on my shares. The idea, however, struck me that it would be useless to annoy my wife on such matters, and I merely replied that I had a violent headache, and would go to bed. The Peruvian Company then collapsed, and I was again a great loser. Still I said nothing to my wife on the state of things. Overend, Gurney, and Co. stopped, and was followed by several other companies in which I was deeply involved. In fact, so agitated and anxious did I become, that I was afraid my mind would sink under it.

"When I now look back and consider my behaviour on many occasions during the time these occurrences took place, I wonder how my mind ever could have recovered its proper tone. One time when drawing a cheque I signed the banker's name to it instead of my own. Fortunately it was done at the bank, and in presence of the cashiers, so that any suspicion of want of integrity on my part could not have arisen. I now remember the cashier looking at me with a peculiar, significant glance, which seemed to tell me he was perfectly well aware of the cause of my blunder—the disturbed state of my mind from the numerous losses I had lately sustained. Again, when I met old acquaintances in the streets, I could hardly remember their features, and totally forgot their names. One occasion especially I remember, when I had dined only the evening before with a friend I had known for years, the next morning I had forgotten his name.

"But of all terrible inflictions, nothing could surpass what I suffered at more than one large dinner we gave. Although I scrupulously abstained from speaking to my wife on the state of my affairs, she seemed to have an innate perception that there was something wrong with them—that some misfortune was hanging over us, and by way

of keeping up appearances, she gave several large dinner parties. It would be difficult to describe to you how intensely painful were these parties, their luxury contrasting so forcibly with the ruined condition of their host. The idea frequently came before me how absurd it would appear, or rather to what bitter satire it would give rise, could the truth be known—that the giver of that splendid feast was in reality poorer than the very waiters who had been engaged to attend at it. Frequently I looked at my guests with a sort of dread lest they might have heard something of the state of my affairs, and were cognisant of the miserable imposture I was practising. The more I reflected, the more inextricable did my position appear, and the weaker became my mental powers to struggle with it. At last, when I was, I believe, almost on the verge of insanity, the state of my finances became publicly known, and there was nothing left for me but the Bankruptcy Court.

“Strange as it may appear to you, the very certainty that I was ruined seemed to act as a relief to me. I felt I was no longer the miserable sham I had been for many months past. Bankruptcy, loss of position, and poverty now seemed to me trifling in comparison with the cruel anxiety under which I had been so long labouring. Whatever the future may be, I have this certainty before me, the direst poverty which can befall me cannot be worse than the splendour I have lately been living in. I can now understand how wrong is the general impression of that look of indifference which so many culprits put on when leaving the dock after their sentence is pronounced. Severe as that may have been, their punishment can hardly be more painful to them than the anxiety their misdeeds occasioned them prior to their conviction. Horrible as the idea of bankruptcy and poverty would have been to me two years ago, I can assure you that their present certainty is infinitely less painful to me than were my struggles during the time I was attempting to avoid them.”

END OF VOL. VI.

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